Surgeon's Symphony

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SURGEON'S SYMPHONY

by

GEORGE SAVA

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Chapter 1
The Grand Duchess

The appointment was for twelve o'clock noon, and I did not want to keep the Grand Duchess waiting. It was not because she was a Grand Duchess. Since the Revolution there have been perhaps more Grand Duchesses in Western Europe and America than ever appeared in the pages of the *Almanach de Gotha* even in the hey-day of Tsars and the Russian Empire. A Russian without a title, without so much as the prefix 'Comrade', has become something of a rarity, like an ordinary seaman among the admirals of the Liberian Navy. No, the Grand Duchess Natalia Ivanovna of Wlastopol was an old friend, an old friend of the family, an unofficial aunt and mother who brought with her all sorts of memories of that Russia in which I had been brought up and which was now dead. If it had not died I should not have been then entering my consulting-room in Harley Street after having performed an operation at the unholy hour of eight o'clock in the morning.

It was just on eleven when I arrived. No doubt my efficient secretary would find plenty to keep me busy before the Grand Duchess was due. New appointments, old ones I had forgotten, communications from the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. . . . But it was of none of these that she spoke when I had settled myself behind my desk.

'The Grand Duchess is here, Mr. Sava,' she said.

So, I thought. She ignores an appointment. She is a Russian and therefore has no sense of time or its value. Time is simply a vacuum to be filled in. But it was strange nevertheless. Grand Duchesses may be an hour late; they may be two hours late. But they are never early, unless there is some pressing reason for it. And by being an

hour before time the Grand Duchess must have come out into an unfamiliar world. To Grand Duchesses there is something indecent about the day before noon.

I raised my eyebrows slightly. 'But I thought . . .' I began.

My secretary nodded. 'Yes, it was twelve o'clock. She can't possibly have misunderstood—she repeated the time after me, slowly, and said she was writing it down.'

'Well, show her in. I am anxious to solve the mystery of the too-early Grand Duchess.'

I knew, of course, that this was not in the best Harley Street manner. The right technique is always to keep people waiting. One is never supposed to have time to spare, odd moments to fill in. One has to impress the waiting patients and show them how great an honour is being done them by seeing them at all. But my secretary had grown used to my heterodoxy. She left the room without a word and returned a moment or two later to announce Her Imperial Highness.

The Grand Duchess was an old lady who had solved the greatest problem of womankind—how to make each year a friend instead of an enemy. In her youth she had been a beautiful girl, and if her skin now no longer had the bloom of spring, it had acquired a no less fascinating—perhaps even more beautiful—patina that was not entirely the product of the beauty salons of Bond Street. She held the secret of making anything look genuine and rich on her. A frock from Oxford Street was transmuted by her so that it simulated the gold of Schiaparelli or Patou, Molyneux or Worth, and the pearl necklace she wore, though I suspected it was at best cultured, might well have come from the Tsaritsa's own collection.

I kissed her hand. 'Good morning, Natalia Ivanovna,' I said.

'Good morning, dear boy,' she returned, 'if you can call the crack of dawn "morning".'

'The appointment was for twelve,' I reminded her, anxious to prove myself guiltless of dragging her from her bed untimely.

'Of course. I know it was.' She dropped into my most comfortable chair and smiled. 'But you are not the Tsar to command me when I shall appear before you. I have come at eleven. Any objection?'

'None. I am always delighted to see you. You could have come at ten had you wished.'

'And found you out, no doubt. A very good way of avoiding importunate patients.'

'And to what do I owe this early call? I am honoured,' I went on.

'Why should I want to see you?' she countered.

'To discuss your operation perhaps. Or maybe to inquire about the welfare of an old friend's son.'

She made a gesture of mock alarm. 'You are old enough to look after yourself, George,' she answered quickly. 'I cannot burden myself with other people's sins at my age. As for my operation, I am sure I shall enjoy it. I shall lie in bed and be violently sick . . .'

'I assure you, you won't be sick,' I put in.

'I insist on being sick,' she said firmly. 'I also insist on being thoroughly miserable. Otherwise I can see no sense in having an operation at all.'

'As you wish,' I replied. 'At any rate you seem determined to take my advice and have the operation.'

She avoided answering. 'Ivan Pavlovitch and I have been happy,' she said irrelevantly. 'I realized he was the cleverest man on earth and, luckily for me, the best-looking also. I have been an obedient wife and faithful. So I have always done what I have wished, especially as my husband has usually told me what I wanted. Once, I was tempted to leave Ivan Pavlovitch,' she went on. 'The country estate bored me to tears. The peasants were all right, but they bowed so deeply to me I hardly ever saw their faces. So I went to Petersburg on the excuse I must have new clothes, and there I kept an assignation with a certain man at a certain ball.'

'Yes?' Was it for this, I asked myself—for this piece of unimportant biography that she had come an hour earlier? Everyone knew that the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Ivan of Wlastopol had achieved the almost impossible. They had lived for years at the Imperial Court and steered clear of the shoals of scandal. Some ascribed it to innocence, others to greater cleverness than that of the majority.

'The Tsar sent for me before I had a chance to keep my assignment,' she continued. 'He talked of Ivan Pavlovitch, his charm, his intelligence, and his love for me. My cavalier was standing almost within arm's length of the Tsar, but his Majesty just did not know him. On the contrary, Ivan Pavlovitch, who was hundreds of miles away, seemed to be standing at his elbow. It made the young man disappear, and I was cured of my love or infatuation or whatever you like to call it. I believe it is amusing to be unfaithful to others, but it is impossible to be unfaithful to oneself and still remain sane. I knew from that moment that Ivan Pavlovitch was part of me and that to be unfaithful to him was to deny myself.'

'I see,' I said. I was sure she was telling me all this for a purpose. She had the air of a person who wants to explain herself in advance. The hint of nostalgia in it all was mere local colour, part of her mental décor.

'The Tsar danced with me.' She made a gracefully expressive gesture. 'I was an Imperial Highness, George, and he, the Tsar, was Nicky. The world glittered with jewels and the brilliant reflections of beautiful women in long mirrors. But the glitter palled. It was not mine. I never saw the Tsar again—or Petersburg either. I went back to Ivan Pavlovitch and I stayed with him. I have been with him ever since . . . and I think his thoughts are my thoughts—though heaven alone knows if mine are his.' She braced herself and looked hard at me. 'Remember that, George, when I come to the point.'

Ah, I thought, so now we are coming to it. All this is just overture. And I had sufficient admiration for Natalia Ivanovna to realize that it must be important. She was a clever woman. And she was no longer young. A clever woman who is no longer young is one to be feared. I had to keep my wits about me.

'What is the time?' she asked abruptly.

'Just on half past eleven,' I replied.

'Which shows you how an old woman can talk. Now, my boy, you advise an operation?'

'I do. Emphatically.'

She shrugged slightly as though she did not entirely believe me, though I was never more serious in my life.

'But', she protested, 'I feel well. My friends tell me I look well . . .'

I shook my head. 'This disease does not cause any overt signs,' I replied. 'Not in the beginning . . . but it is there all the same, and all the more dangerous for not asserting itself. Let me show you the X-ray photographs. You can see for yourself.'

I drew out a large envelope from the drawer of my desk and displayed the radiographs to her. She looked at them with an expression that was half fear and half amusement. I could tell she knew she was a little afraid and was trying to hide it.

'Do my internals really look like that?' she asked, with a feeble attempt to joke.

It was no joking matter. I pointed to a patch that showed up like a deep shadow on the general greyness.

'You see that shadow?' I said. 'It is a growth.' I took a deep breath, for I knew that what I was going to say would not please her. It

would not have pleased anyone for that matter. 'Natalia Ivanovna,' I continued earnestly, 'I consider this is our last opportunity for a successful operation. If we delay any more, the result may be fatal.' I had almost said 'will be fatal', which would have been nearer the truth.

'I see.' She took it well, seriously and calmly. 'Well, it has to be faced. Ivan Pavlovitch always says: "The English have a habit of facing facts; that's what makes them such sentimental idealists." I prefer not to face facts. They are hard and catch one in the most tender spots, like a knobbly bed.' She broke off her effort to be jocular. 'Very well, then. If it has to be an operation I'd rather you do it than any other doctor.'

'Thank you.'

'But don't run away with the idea it's because I think you're a good surgeon,' she retorted. 'I like keeping money between friends. All the same, I trust you.' She said the last words oddly as though rather surprised at her faith.

'Natalia Ivanovna,' I said, 'this is a case in which I mustn't take chances. I must insist that another surgeon be present at the operation, and I have, as a matter of fact, already contacted Sir Basil Crossley about it. All that remains now is to fix a date . . .'

'Now don't try to rush me,' she interrupted firmly. 'I mean, not yet. . . .'

'It's no good, Natalia Ivanovna. It's been postponed long enough. Come . . . face the facts, as you said you would. The sooner it is done the better.'

She cast a glance at me and then turned her eyes downward. It was some moments before she spoke again.

'I'm a coward, George,' she said slowly. 'Yes, I admit it. I find life slipping through my fingers like a greasy string you can't catch hold of. Days turn themselves into weeks, weeks into months, and no time seems to have passed at all. I wonder if you can understand that at your age? I hope not. Oh, it is not good to be old . . . but so good to be alive! After all, the only promise life ever keeps is death. That's what makes it so absurd. The end is inevitable, yet I want to escape it, to give life a chance to make and break a thousand other promises before it fulfils that one. But does it really matter?'

Perhaps for the first time in our friendship I consciously realized that she was an old woman, one whose whole way of life had been diverted from the high road of luxury to the rough tracks of exile. True, her lot had been better than that of many. She had not known

want or penury. But, like most of her kind, she had clung obstinately to the world she had lost, a world that could never be recovered, and had refused to find any real place in another.

'I am certain all will turn out well,' I said seriously but with a feeling of inadequacy.

She seemed to be combating some sort of internal conflict. I waited till at last she looked up.

'Don't think I hope to see Russia again,' she said. 'The miles and the years between my Russia and myself have built up an insurmountable wall. No, I just love life. That's it. Ivan Pavlovitch knows it. He loves life, too. And that is why . . .'

She looked at me rather fearfully. Ah, I thought, now we *are* coming to it. All this talk of life has been just a diversion, like the reminiscences of the Tsar. She wants to refuse to be operated upon. It is going to be a battle of wills.

'Yes?' I prompted.

'George,' she said desperately, 'you must promise me not to be angry. Promise, please.'

'I could not be angry with you, Natalia Ivanovna. Disappointed perhaps, but not angry.'

'It's like this,' she continued. 'Ivan Pavlovitch wants to take a second opinion—that's what you call it, isn't it?'

Was that all, I wondered. I asked for nothing better, for I knew the reassuring effect of a second opinion. I had no doubts of my own diagnosis, but confirmation is always welcome.

'I'm delighted to hear it,' I returned warmly. 'But I don't see what all the fuss is about. Why, it is just what I was suggesting a moment or two ago, when I told you I had contacted Sir Basil Crossley. I can think of no better man.'

She looked a little dismayed. 'Actually,' she said hesitantly, 'the Grand Duke had somebody else in mind—if you agree, of course.'

'Naturally I agree. My dear Natalia Ivanovna, anything that makes this—this episode—easier for you and the Grand Duke must be done, obviously. How can you doubt my co-operation?'

I had thought to put her at ease, for there was still a small frown on her brow—a frown I could not understand. She was doing the right thing. What was she afraid of?

'Tell me,' I asked her, 'do I know the man?'

'Well, he only arrived in this country yesterday.'

'I see. A foreigner?'

'What a very English Russian you are, George,' she retorted, with

a flash of her normal spirit. 'You're a foreigner yourself really, you know.'

'I suppose so—in a way.'

'Then don't carve the world up into Englishmen and foreigners, as the born English do, or I shall begin to feel quite awkward. I shall expect you to refer to me as "that foreign duchess woman" or something. But to get back to business . . .'

'That is the most important thing, I agree. Is he American?' He could, I felt, hardly be anything else. The war had put an end to the parade of foreign specialists who had led the public by the nose; had finished the day when to speak with a German accent was a passport to medical fame.

She was beginning to look awkward again.

'He comes from America, yes,' she answered, 'but actually he is a Russian, like you and me. You must have heard of him—Pyotr, Father Pyotr.'

I could not reply. I was thunderstruck. If she had named one of the leading American surgeons, I should have felt honoured, for I have a high regard for my colleagues in the United States. But Father Pyotr . . .! Of course I knew him. Every Russian knew him. Father Pyotr! It was incredible. Fantastic! I began to wonder if it was not time to call in a mental specialist, but whether to myself or to Natalia Ivanovna I did not know.

'Pyotr!' I exclaimed. 'The new Rasputin?'

'Oh, that's an exaggeration. You know what American newspapers are. He hates having had that label tied on him. He doesn't resemble Rasputin at all.'

'That may be,' I said. I had written a book on Rasputin and considered myself something of an authority. 'But surely,' I went on, as the enormity of the suggestion dawned more fully on me, 'surely you are not serious. The Grand Duke must have in mind some medical authority, someone whose opinion we could accept and rely on. Really . . .' I did not know how to go on. I was overwhelmed. Cranks and quacks, some misguidedly sincere, others with their eyes fixed on profit, have been to see me and wasted my time with cancer cures, faith systems, secret remedies, hypnotic techniques, fads of the most ingenious—and sometimes diabolical—kind. But never before had a patient, a patient who was also a friend, blatantly suggested that I should submit my diagnosis and proposed treatment to the opinion of a Russian holy man, a spiritual 'healer' and miracle worker. My mind reeled. Surely . . . But Natalia Ivanovna was speaking again.

'Pyotr is accompanying Princess Dania to England,' she was saying. 'She heard of my illness and wanted to be with me. Much too much fuss, of course, but there it is. I'm pleased all the same. It's nice in these days to have a grand-daughter who cares. Young people nowadays are so odd as a rule.'

'Natalia Ivanovna,' I said with all the dignity I could command, 'do you mean to tell me that you and the Grand Duke are going to take the advice of this—this charlatan (it was a hard word, but I meant it) and be influenced by him?'

'Now, now,' she said soothingly, as though I were a naughty child who had used a swear word picked up from one of the stable-boys, 'you are still young and you are prejudiced. You have not seen the many inexplicable, miraculous things that happen to those who have faith. You hurt me, for it shows you are not a real Russian any more. You see, I have had the most wonderful reports of Pyotr, quite apart from what we knew of him in the old days. All my friends in America consult him, and he has had success after success. Surely you know he was called in to help poor Xenia Malornky—you remember her? The mother of my son-in-law. She had been to every imaginable specialist without result. Eventually she was taken to Pyotr. He took one look at her and exclaimed, 'Ah, Her Highness sucks her thumb!'

'Rasputin used roughly the same trick on a Pekinese dog, I think.' I could not keep the note of contempt from my voice. 'This is ridiculous, Natalia Ivanovna. Surely we have learnt our lesson from the wonder-working moujik? This man may be holy and all that, but he is not a doctor. You can't put your life in his hands.'

'He is a great healer,' she insisted, 'doctor or no doctor. He should have his chance. If he fails—well, you can say "I told you so."'

'It's not a thing I like saying when one of my patients has been mauled. I cannot be a party to such criminal nonsense.'

At once she became the Grand Duchess.

'I am afraid', she said slowly and with great firmness and dignity, 'that as my doctor you must see Pyotr. I desire it. The Grand Duke is coming here with him and my grand-daughter. I came in advance, as an act of courtesy, to inform you.'

'I see,' I returned bitterly. 'This is a fine plot.'

'You have no reason to be angry, George,' she said, softening a little. 'I got up in what was the middle of the night to me to prepare you. I want you to be reasonable. I want you, most of all, to be my friend and help me. I have told you I am an obedient wife. The

Grand Duke wants me to see Pyotr and be guided by him. So I must do as he wishes. After all, there are forces in the universe about which we know nothing and . . .'

'Ah! The "more things in heaven and earth stuff"'! I exclaimed. 'The old excuse for sloppy thinking and defending the absurd and irrational. You can rely on me, Natalia Ivanovna. As a friend I shall do what I can with this prophet. As a doctor I reserve the right to fight with him. All I ask you is to remember that this is 1941 not 1914, and that this is England in the midst of the grimmest war in history, not the Tsar's Russia denying that there is such a thing as the future. We are living to-day in the twentieth century, not the incredulous, incredible middle ages.'

She laid her hand on my arm. 'Be angry if it does you any good, George. Break something. Tell me what you propose to do. After all, I feel certain Pyotr will agree with you. If he does, all will be well. I shall be ready for anything and will do anything you say. And now, cheer up,' she added. 'Smile! This is only one of the Grand Duke's little whims. He has to be humoured, you know. All men do. This will blow over like all the other things that looked like storms and turned out to be no more than a breeze. That's what keeps us young.'

She watched me closely, with a quizzical half smile on her lips, as I sat back in thought. Perhaps she realized she had won half her point. My first decision had been that I would not even see this Father Pyotr, and I was already regretting I had not stuck to it. I had temporized. And when a man begins temporizing on a matter of principle, he has taken a long, long stride in the direction of his downfall. Uncomfortably in my mind's eye I could already see myself being cajoled and bullied into listening to this fakir's preposterous theories with respect, and perhaps even agreeing to them. Here was one more folly to add to the many that had marked my life. Worse. . . .

I was not allowed to pursue my disturbing reflections, for at that moment my secretary tapped at the door to announce the arrival of the Grand Duke.

'Show him in,' I said. It was better to get this affair over. The longer I deferred it, the more time I should have for thought—and my thoughts had grown distasteful to me.

A moment later I was welcoming the Grand Duke, his granddaughter—and Father Pyotr.

Let me introduce this little party which suddenly seemed to make

my consulting-room small and cramped. Probably it was because it now held two large men. The Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol was so much like a Russian Grand Duke in exile that some cynical people were inclined to doubt his authenticity—of which, however, there was no question. He was tall, upright, and impressive. His hair was greying and thinning. His clothes came from Savile Row—as they probably always had, just as the Grand Duchess's had come from the Rue de la Paix. England had not, however, failed to leave its traces on him: he had acquired a little restraint.

And if Ivan Pavlovitch was the complete Grand Duke, Dania was no less the Russian princess of the Hollywood movie. Very young, very beautiful, very sweet, she had an air distinctly more Russian than her grand-parents. While they were Russian because they had been born so and had grown up in the Empire of the Tsars, Dania was consciously the Russian aristocrat. Yet she had never, in her short life, been to Russia, which to her was simply some fairyland seen through the distorting lenses of her elders' nostalgic memories.

Together, these two would have made an impressive, perhaps in some circumstances overpowering, pair. For all that, it was Pyotr who dominated the room. He, too, was tall—perhaps an inch or so above the Grand Duke in height. He wore long black robes on which his gold, jewelled crucifix stood out brilliantly. Above his well-trimmed beard shone a pair of dark eyes that were obviously hypnotic. They were, in fact, the kind of eye which novelists describe as boring into one. He stood slightly apart, with his arms folded across his chest so as to accentuate his crucifix and show off his long, white, impressive hands.

This, I said to myself, is the Russian Holy Man, improved and polished by American drawing-rooms and made self-conscious by American publicity. Natalia Ivanovna was right. He was no Rasputin, no peasant who had forced his way up into the councils of the great. He was clean, well-manicured, his beard and hair looking as though fresh from an expensive barber's shop. But he differed from Rasputin also in not having that extraordinary man's suggestion of sincerity and belief, however deluded, in his own mystical mission. This man, I thought, is exactly what I called him: a charlatan. He is a natural hunter of credulous women.

And his first actions confirmed all the unfavourable impressions I formed of him. The Grand Duke performed the introductions. He presented me to Dania, whom I quickly disposed of in the

nearest chair. I was in no mood for battling with bold-eyed glances that told of American standards of entertainment.

'George,' said the Grand Duke impressively, 'allow me to present our Holy Father Pyotr, who has come all the way from America to help our Natalia Ivanovna.'

I swallowed this as best I could. Help our Natalia Ivanovna indeed! What, in heaven's name, was I there for? What had I . . .? But it was not yet time for fighting, if fight there had to be.

'Welcome to England, Holy Father,' I greeted.

'The blessing of God be upon you, my son.' His deep voice, with its marked American accent—he spoke in English—reverberated through the room. No doubt he had learnt that trick from teachers of elocution in some school of dramatic art. It suggested the stage, dimly lit with blue floods, rather than the pale sunlight reflected from the walls of the cloisters.

'I hope you had a comfortable trip,' I went on, determined to be polite and friendly.

'We were in the care of God', he replied, 'and nearer to Him than usual. Up there, in the clouds, all seems light and good.'

'So you came by 'plane?' I was surprised. 'Right through from America?'

The Grand Duke nodded. 'Yes. I managed to get seats for him and Dania in a Clipper. They told me at first that it was only travellers on official business connected with the war who could make reservations. I told them Natalia Ivanovna was seriously ill and needed both the special attention of Pyotr and the loving care of her grand-daughter. They relented. What else could they do?'

'You are a genius, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I said. The Grand Duke was well launched now on an account of how he was helping the war effort by giving hush-hush advice on Russia to some Government Department or other. I was not interested, though I did play with the passing thought that it was to be hoped some official advisers on Russian affairs had more up-to-date knowledge than his, which, at the best, was twenty years old. I cut him short as soon as I could and turned again to Father Pyotr, who had moved deliberately—I am sure of it—to a position where the light fell better on his crucifix and the hands underlying it.

'I am glad you have come, Holy Father,' I said. 'You will be able to give Natalia Ivanovna spiritual aid in her ordeal.' If I can force that on him, I thought, well and good. He could have the whole

world for his spiritual exercises, for all I cared, provided he did not come between me and my patients.

'I hope to do more than that,' he said solemnly. 'The body is nothing without the soul.'

So it had to be a fight. I could see that. He was not prepared to keep within his own province, though no doubt he would have protested hotly if I had tried to save souls with a scalpel or rescue the fallen with a forceps.

'The soul also needs a body,' I rejoined.

'True. But while the soul can live—does live—free of its material resting place, the body is, as I say, nothing without the soul. That is why I have studied both.'

I looked at him sharply. I knew—and admired—medical missionaries who chose to work in the dark places of the earth. Was this holy man a new kind who was extending the principle to the darker places of civilization?

'You have studied medicine, then?' I asked.

'I was granted divine inspiration,' he replied, with an air of finality that I was not prepared to accept.

'I see. It sounds an easy way.' I could not hold that back. 'Does divine inspiration enable you to make a diagnosis in matters of the body?'

He looked at me as though I had asked a foolish question.

'Always,' he answered tersely.

'And it is always correct?'

'I am never in doubt. I reply not on imperfect human knowledge but on eternal wisdom.'

'And your patients, have they no doubts?'

'Doubts die in the presence of faith,' he returned.

'Faith does not live in the dead,' I retorted. 'It seems to me safer to rely on medicine, imperfect as I admit it to be, than on intuition, which has no rules.'

His eyes flashed. 'Do you suggest that God can be wrong?'

'Not at all. But can't *you* be wrong? Can't you misinterpret His messages?'

His thumb and forefinger slid up the shaft of the crucifix. 'No,' he replied.

I made a gesture of resignation. I had lost the first round on points. He had warded off my attack skilfully and had brought me to the point of losing my temper. There was an uneasy silence for a little while. It was broken by Dania.

'The holy father has never failed us yet,' she said eagerly. 'I have seen him at work many times; I have spoken with those whom he has healed. He will help my grandmother, however serious it may be. He cannot fail.'

'You are as sure as that?' I asked, surprised that one so young, yet so sophisticated, should fall a victim to this kind of thing.

She nodded. Her eyes were bright and she cast a look of admiration at Pyotr, who took it as his right.

'You should go and work with the holy father for six months, George,' said the Grand Duke. 'You could learn much.'

'No doubt. Thank you for the suggestion, Ivan Pavlovitch, but I prefer to stick to the rules laid down by the General Medical Council and the British Medical Association.'

'It's a pity you are so prejudiced,' he returned. 'You might change your mind . . . you may, as it is.'

He said this so that it sounded almost like a threat. I looked at Dania who had her eyes still fixed devotedly on Pyotr. I looked at the Grand Duke's grave and earnest face. I caught Natalia Ivanovna's eye, which did not sparkle in return. I felt I was surrounded by enemies, that here, in my own room, amid my own books, my own case notes, in the very headquarters of my work, I was being asked to abdicate in favour of a quack.

I am anxious to hear what Father Pyotr makes of the case,' I said colourlessly.

'Very well, my son. But first I ask you to pray.'

The Grand Duchess knelt, as the holy father made the sign of the cross. The Grand Duke knelt. Dania knelt. Perforce, I, too, knelt. In the silence I heard a slight tap at the door and looked round quickly. I caught sight of my secretary's startled face. She was right. These were certainly queer proceedings in a Harley Street consulting-room. But, then, the whole thing was a farce—farce that had in it a touch of the macabre. I felt almost inclined to believe in Pyotr's inspiration—provided he admitted it came from Powers of Evil rather than Powers of Good.

Chapter 2

Father Pyotr

It was over at last. Pyotr's 'Amen' echoed round the room as though it was a sounding chamber. The Grand Duke rose to his feet, looking a little relieved, and began dusting his elegantly creased trousers, while I helped Natalia Ivanovna to regain her chair. The whole thing had left a nasty taste in my mouth. True, it was no more than I might have expected—whatever was to follow now—but I felt some resentment against Their Imperial Highnesses of Wlastopol. It would have been in better taste to stage these proceedings in their own apartments, with me there as a spectator or participant if they insisted.

I looked round the small group. Dania's glance returned again and again to the slightly arrogant features of the holy father. The Grand Duke appeared somewhat embarrassed, and his consort avoided my gaze. It seemed as though they were waiting for me. I suppose they were right, as I was in some sense the host, but I was not anxious for matters to go further. Apart from that, of course, I was obviously billed as one of the chief actors, in a role I did not like. As for Pyotr he remained aloof, but not entirely indifferent. He did not so much resent me as despise me. Despite myself, I could not dismiss his opinion of me as of no account.

'Do you need my assistance for your . . . your work, Holy Father?' I asked, unable to bear the silence any longer.

He glanced at the window and nodded as he saw the sunshine.

'I need no help but the stillness of this glorious morning. It is sufficient for me to bask in the smile of God. That is all I require —that and my map.'

'Your map?' I gasped.

Again he nodded, but he did not offer any immediate explanation. 'Will you please make certain we are not in any way disturbed?' he went on. 'Interruptions of any kind are likely to be disastrous. I cannot stand the strain.'

Ever since he had begun to lead up to his performance I had been waiting for something of this kind. I had heard almost the same words time and again at the spiritualist séances I had attended

in Paris—and at Notting Hill Gate. These dealers in the mystic are such sensitive plants. The slightest zephyr of curiosity causes them to wilt and shrivel. I said nothing, I merely lifted my telephone and gave the necessary instructions. Nothing, I said, was to be allowed to interrupt us. I must have spoken desperately, for my secretary made understanding and sympathetic noises at the other end of the line.

'You need have no fear now, Holy Father,' I said, as I replaced the instrument. 'Is there anything else I can do?'

'See that the windows are shut fast and bolted,' he commanded.

I turned away, as much to hide my expression as to do his behest. For I am sure I was growing red in the face. The situation was getting right out of hand. It was bad enough to have this man brought to me, but at any rate it was done under the cloak of seeking a second opinion. Now it was obvious I did not count. I was degraded to the statue of a mere lackey, a property man at some fantastic magical entertainment. The 'healer' had not a single idea of common courtesy. He had not asked me to give my views, nor had he requested a private interview to discuss the case. As I pushed home the window fastener I smiled to myself. Perhaps, after all, it was good for my pride.

Pyotr had turned to the Grand Duke.

'Did you bring the candles?' I heard him ask.

Ivan Pavlovitch nodded and produced some long white candles from a small case he had brought with him.

'These are the best I could get,' he said. 'They follow your description very closely.'

Pyotr inspected them with the air of a tennis player selecting a racket. . . .

'I should have preferred blessed candles,' he remarked; and the words seemed to crush the Grand Duke. 'But these will do. God is universal and international and omnipresent. He will accept these.'

'The windows are closed,' I reported, rejoining the group. 'Tell me, Holy Father, were you afraid the draught would blow out the candles?'

'Holy candles do not blow out,' he returned. 'A monk of the Order of Holy John of Tobolsk—the saint who had in his charge the destiny of the Imperial Family—once held such a candle to light the way for the Tsar and conducted His Majesty to church through a snowstorm.'

'So you still believe in Holy John of Tobolsk?' I asked, determined to fight every inch of the way, even I could use only harrassing tactics.

'Of course,' he replied with a superior air.

'But no doubt you are aware of what happened to the Russian Imperial Family?' I pursued. 'His protection does not seem to have been very sure.'

I had stung him. I could see it in the quick, nervous movement of those tapering hands. They were far more expressive than his face, which he kept always like a mask.

'In that regrettable incident,' he retorted, rather too quickly, '. . . I refer to the Russian Revolution . . . much happened for which neither saint nor man can be held responsible.'

'That cuts both ways, does it not?' I demanded blandly.

The Grand Duke had been fidgeting through these exchanges.

'I consider your attitude rather unfair, George,' he said severely. 'The holy father has travelled here at my special request all the way from America for exactly the same purpose as you have in view, I believe—to assist Natalia Ivanovna. You have been nothing but obstructive and you have set out to be objectionable at the slightest opportunity. I feel I must apologize to him. It is an insult to both him and me.'

Enemies, I thought. Enemies surrounding me in my own room!

'But surely, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I burst out, 'you cannot seriously expect me to accept medical advice from a man who, however honest and sincere he may be, does not know the first thing about medicine? I have spent years trying to master my profession. Now this man comes along and professes to be able to make a diagnosis on the strength of something he calls "divine inspiration". He does not even pay me the compliment of asking me what I, in my alleged ignorance, have decided.'

The Grand Duke checked me with a cold gesture.

'His past successes prove his methods right,' he said stiffly.

I sighed wearily. 'Very well. I will see this tragi-comedy through. But it sticks in my throat, not that he presumes to criticise me but that you should prefer his uninformed opinion to mine. These candles! And this map he speaks of! Let me impress this on you, Ivan Pavlovitch: Natalia Ivanovna is seriously ill. How seriously, she herself did not know until I told her about half an hour before your arrival. I ask nothing better than that you should seek a second opinion in such a grave prognosis as I have made—but

I ask you—I beg of you—that it be the opinion of a medical man.'

The Grand Duke had his answer ready. 'Do you realize that Petroff, our greatest surgeon, always lit two candles in front of the Holy Virgin before he would operate?'

'But first', I rejoined, 'he learnt surgery. And he operated according to its rules.'

'Cease!' exclaimed Pyotr dramatically. 'Do not argue, Ivan Pavlovitch. Do not quarrel with this purblind man who has strayed so far from our Russian way of truth. Let him watch and listen, and judge for himself. Faith will come to him, and he will see the hand of God guiding His humble and unworthy servant.'

I had to admit that this man had force of personality. He spoke with mock humility, but in doing so he took complete charge of the situation. He implied quite clearly that my three visitors were his devoted supporters and assigned me the role of spectator and learner. I resolved that the best thing to do was to wait and trust that the absurdity of the whole business would of itself restore the Grand Duke and his family to sanity.

Pyotr surveyed my walls with a keen eye. In a sharp voice he ordered me to remove the one picture that graced them—a small work by Dürer that I had picked up in Germany and which I much valued. Then he fumbled in his voluminous robes and drew out a roll, to reveal his 'map'—a chart that consisted of many different colours. When he had hung it on the wall he bade us sit down, and he took his stand alongside the Duchess.

'For hundreds of years', he began, 'the holy fathers of my Order have possessed the secret of this map. Every copy that exists has been blessed, and each has served to save many Russian lives and guide many Russian doctors. In all our prayers, day and night, each one of us who possesses a copy prays for divine guidance for his hand—for it is the hand that builds the bridge from uncertainty to certainty, from guesswork to complete knowledge. This map, which no doubt looks strange and meaningless to you, portrays all the human organs, each of which is indicated by a separate colour. The heart, the lungs, the stomach, the kidneys, and so on —each has its place on the map.'

It was too glib. I knew he had recited precisely those words not once before but hundreds and hundreds of times. He was worse than a charlatan: he was a cheap-jack, whose proper place was a soap-box at a fair or a race-meeting. And he was more

dangerous. He had climbed upward from the comparatively safe level of selling cures for baldness to the risky heights providing 'cures' for all things, even those conditions which only the surgeon's knife can alleviate.

Dania looked in wide-eyed wonder at the chart, fascinated like a child—and as she was intended to be—by its bright, garish colours.

'Which represents which, Holy Father?' she asked.

'We have taken a solemn vow before God never to reveal the secret, my daughter,' he replied. 'Not until one has been a member of the Holy Order for ten years is one admitted to the secret. Then, too, is one given the sacred arrow.'

This time he brought out from his robes a small dart in gold and ivory, and held it up reverently.

'The one I have was blessed by the late Patriarch Tikhon, who took it with him to Jerusalem. When I saw him for the last time, he gave it to me and said I should use it for the benefit of all mankind and particularly all Russians. It never leaves my person. Night and day it is with me, and retention of my power to use it is the constant theme of my prayers. To-day, before I came here, knowing I should be assailed by doubt, I prayed for three hours without a break.'

This was too much. 'Did the patriarch tell you where he got it from?' I asked, almost before I knew what I was saying.

Pyotr was quite unruffled. He had come prepared to be assailed with doubt. He had just said so.

'He told me,' he went on impressively, in his best showman's manner. 'Once, the Holy Patriarch prayed for three days without stopping, kneeling incessantly, so that for many days afterwards he had no use in his legs. During the last night of his ordeal a mighty storm raged round the monastery. The night was white with snow that hung like a ceiling over the monastery, which was bathed in the majestic light of a full moon. For hundreds of miles round, humble peasants sank to their knees, their simple hearts assuring them that they were the witnesses of a miracle. Everything was white and silvery, and the snow danced and rose in the storm. Then, through this cloak of whiteness came a star from heaven, an arrow of pure gold, pointing like the finger of an angel. As quickly as it appeared, it went. The Patriarch prayed on in his cell. He heard a sound as though a deep, resonant church bell had tolled once, and he knew that his temptation had come. God and the Devil were tempting him

to move his eyes, to look behind him and seek the cause of this wonderful sound, for there was no such bell in the whole monastery. But he prayed on without ceasing. He did not move his eyes; he remained still. And outside the storm abated. The snow dropped down again to rest on the roofs, and at last dawn came to relieve the long night. The morning brought with it glorious sunshine. Then the brethren came to help the Holy Patriarch after his long vigil. They pointed to the corner of the cell where lay something that looked to them like a golden arrow.' He paused dramatically. 'This', he ended, again holding up the dart, 'is that arrow.'

In spite of myself I felt interested. He had told his story well, in a rapt voice, as though he himself was in touch with voices beyond our sight and ears. He looked about him and shot a keen glance at me, waiting for some retort. I did not oblige him. He had started on his act, and the best thing to do was to leave him to get over it as soon as possible. I felt I was being cunning. Now, if something went wrong, he would not be able to fall back on the excuse that I had disturbed him.

After a short pause, during which I saw the Grand Duke's lips move as if in prayer, he resumed.

'It is necessary that the person seeking guidance from the blessed map shall come in contact with the arrow. The best thing of all is a hair. I shall ask Natalia Ivanovna to kiss the arrow and then I shall pluck from her head a hair, which I shall wind round the arrow. Then we shall pray together, my left hand holding her right, and my right hand will await divine guidance to launch the arrow at the map. Where it strikes, there lies the root of the trouble, and God will tell me what to do.'

It was worse than I thought—an age-old method of fortune-telling dressed in different clothes—not new clothes, for these were dusty with the superstitions of the Russian Church, the superstitions that had hoodwinked a nation into obedience to unworthy masters. My heart pounded. I wanted to seize that dart from those sinuous fingers and plunge the sharp point into the holy father's body. But I controlled myself as well as I could. I did not want a scene, and if I had spoken then I might have offended the Grand Duke. Indeed, I knew that any protest from me then would be disastrous. These people—two of them old and one young, all three intelligent—believed in this purveyor of worn-out miracles. They would be shocked at my scepticism and impiety. I should certainly lose my patient. My job was to save Natalia Ivanovna. To hand her over unprotected to this

unscrupulous man who gambled in human lives and human suffering was to throw her into the jaws of death, from which I knew there was still a chance to save her. I could not have concealed my thoughts completely, for Pyotr continued with a little exhortation.

'The Russia of the true God can never be lost,' he intoned. 'There is doubt in this room, but it does not anger me. It does but move me to pity. The true Russian has an unspeakable faith in God's miracles—miracles that are so true and simple, so light and eternal. A healer must have faith in these miracles and see the hand of God pointing the way to him. Books can teach much, but they cannot replace the inspiration of God, which comes through the heart to the mind. In that way comes a wisdom so deep that it can never be analysed, a knowledge so comprehensive that it can never be written down.' His eyes lingered on me, challenging me to confute him, daring me to be honest with myself and throw his lies back in his teeth. But I held fast—for the sake of Natalia Ivanovna.

'Now, my children, let us pray.'

He folded his hands and turned his back toward us. Outlined against the window, his was a truly impressive figure. He was asking these people to believe in that in which humanity is always most ready to believe: the incredible and transcendental. The power of reason has made Man, but man himself distrusts his own reason. He is willing ever to escape its grim, inexorable lessons and take refuge in the comforting vapours of magic ritual. I do not deny or decry God. But I believe that, as Man has struggled upward from the ape, so he must struggle upward and onward, painfully and slowly, to the knowledge of God and of a Reality that must lie for ever just beyond his grasp. To me the idea that the finite, still unperfected, can comprehend the Infinite is a contradiction in terms.

We bowed our heads. Silence descended. And when at last Pyotr's deep 'Amen' boomed out, it had the force of a whiplash.

The holy father turned and held out the golden arrow. First he held it to Ivan Pavlovitch's lips and the Grand Duke kissed it piously, as, years ago, I had seen peasants kiss some holy relic. As Dania kissed it she suddenly stretched forward and kissed Pyotr's hand; and both kisses had the same quality of reverence. He offered the arrow to me and I just brushed it, but I have to confess that the solemnity of the moment had overcome me a little. At that moment I could understand why it is so many explorers set out sceptical and curious and return from their expeditions half-convinced of the reality of magic and the witch-doctor's mumbo-jumbo.

At last he came to Natalia Ivanovna. Before she kissed the arrow she cast an imploring look at her husband, who nodded encouragingly and smiled. She bowed her head over the arrow and as she did so Pyotr stooped and plucked from it a single hair.

Slowly the holy father wound the hair about the shaft of the arrow, reciting at the same time in a monotonous voice:

'This comes from Natalia Ivanovna, who is for ever faithful and obedient.'

It was magic—magic calling on its oldest ally, hypnotism. The carefully built up atmosphere, the droning voice, the impressive figure with the jewelled crucifix glittering on the jet-black background, the cunningly manœuvred hands that passed ceaselessly to and fro—given initial belief, who knows what a man, or woman, might seem to hear and see in such surroundings? I felt I must keep all my wits about me, counter every suggestion made to me. I felt a belated, grudging admiration for the man. He might not be a doctor. His ethics, from the medical standpoint, might be negligible. But he was a superb showman, and had the psychology of deception at his finger tips.

Now he was standing with the arrow poised in his hand. He seemed to have grown suddenly bigger and taller. As he stood he chanted in a voice that called to mind the echoes of the old monasteries:

"This goes to the eternal Giver of Help, the Father of all, the Ever-Merciful.'

The Grand Duke, the Grand Duchess, and the Princess Dania rose slowly to their feet. Once again I was reminded of the effects of hypnotism. There was something mechanical in the movement. They were acting as if they were not quite in complete control of themselves. I, too, rose. I felt no compulsion, but felt it would break the tense atmosphere if I made any gesture of defiance.

Now Pyotr began to mutter another prayer. A rapt look came over his face, as though he was in a state of semi-trance. Rhythmically he swayed to and fro, to and fro. One could almost imagine that he was trying to get in line with the divine powers that, he said, were to guide the arrow to its appointed target.

The atmosphere grew tenser and tenser. Natalia Ivanovna suddenly put her hand to her heart, and I glanced at her quickly. But it was emotional stress from which she was suffering. She did not need a doctor—yet. The Grand Duke bowed his head, as though he could no longer concentrate, while Dania kept her eyes riveted on Pyotr with an expression that was one of absolute self-abasement.

Meanwhile Pyotr swayed slowly from side to side. Suddenly his frame went taut, and he grasped Natalia's right hand with his left. Then with a sweeping, compelling movement he projected the arrow into the air. For all the world, he looked as though some unseen force had seized his hand and directed it. My eyes, like those of all the others, followed the flight of the arrow as it swept through the air. It struck fairly in the middle of the red field and trembled with the force of its impact.

The Grand Duke leant forward and patted Natalia Ivanovna's free hand. He was obviously deeply moved. I believe tears glistened in his eyes.

'A great man! A holy man!' he exclaimed, turning to me. 'Now are you convinced?'

It was a question I did not want to answer—not then at any rate.

'What is there to be convinced of?' I asked. 'So far there has been no diagnosis—nothing but an exhibition of dart throwing.'

He cast a shocked glance at me and relapsed into silence.

Pyotr crossed the room and looked at his map. Then he returned and gently took Natalia Ivanovna's head between his two hands. He kissed her solemnly on both cheeks.

'God has spared you, my daughter,' he said vibrantly. 'You may rejoice. All is well—wonderfully well.'

'Thank you, thank you, Holy Father,' she whispered, half sobbing. The reaction was now setting in. She looked limp and listless.

'What does it mean, Holy Father?' asked the Grand Duke. 'The arrow is in a coloured field. To me it looks like the red of blood.'

'That is not the red of blood, my son,' Pyotr replied. 'The particular position of the arrow indicates that the trouble lies near the heart and the stomach—to be precise, between them."

I looked up sharply. Either he had been told of my diagnosis or he was doing some pretty shrewd guessing. He saw my look and I can almost swear that a smile flickered about his usually hard-set mouth.

'And you can say what it is?' asked the Grand Duke.

'The way in which the arrow struck tells me that', continued Pyotr, enjoying every moment of his triumph, 'it is harmless.'

Natalia Ivanovna caught her breath and folded her hands in prayer.

'It is not a growth, then?' The Grand Duke glanced at me.

'No.' This time there was no mistaking the glint of malicious victory in Pyotr's eye as he faced me. 'It is not a growth. It is nothing more or less than flatulence.'

There was a short silence—and I broke it. I could contain myself no longer. I had ridden myself on a tight rein long enough.

'Enough!' I cried. 'I have been greatly amused. Your performance has been brilliant, Father Pyotr.'

'Beware, my son.' Pyotr's expression was dangerous. He held up a warning hand.

'Of what?' I demanded. 'I am not an aid of charlatans, unless they succeed in deluding my patients and interfere with my work. I . . .'

'George!' The Grand Duke's mouth set. He was commanding with the force of a man who has had the right to command all his life. 'I will not tolerate your attitude any longer. That is enough.'

But I refused to be browbeaten. This was England, not Tsarist Russia.

'I have the right to speak,' I returned. 'He has had his turn, Ivan Pavlovitch, and now it is mine. Till this moment, I have tried to give him a fair chance, in spite of what you have called my prejudice. While he went through his impressive act I still clung to the belief that you, as reasonable, experienced people, could not really have faith in him. It seemed incredible, for I am quite sure that Pyotr himself does not believe in one word of his story of the holy arrow and the Patriarch Tikhon and the miraculous chart. I believed he would adroitly wriggle out of a nasty corner by vaguely confirming my diagnosis—the correct diagnosis arrived at by scientific procedure. That was what I expected, I repeat, for though I think nothing of the holy father as a healer of men's bodies, he has convinced me he is extremely shrewd. True, he has vaguely located the seat of the trouble—every one of us in this room knew that. For the rest, he is trying to dissuade you from the one course that, to the best of my knowledge, is the only possible one—an immediate operation.'

Pyotr glowered. 'You are talking nonsense,' he snapped. 'I ignore the things you have been pleased to say about me, because your eyes are clouded with hostility. But the arrow has pointed its infallible finger. No-one would think of operating on a case of flatulence.'

'It is not flatulence,' I said, my temper rising despite my efforts to keep it under control. I was not going to be told I was talking nonsense about my own speciality—here in my own room. 'Natalia Ivanovna's condition is something very much worse than flatulence. It has been shown beyond doubt . . . the X-rays prove it . . . that there is a dangerous growth, and . . .'

'I deny it.'

'You can't deny X-ray photographs. To-day I told Natalia Ivanovna that the growth has malignant tendencies . . .'

Pyotr laughed derisively. 'Flatulence with malignant tendencies. You are a fool, young man.'

I swallowed hard. My impulse was to kick this fellow from the room.

'Your advice then, Father Pyotr, is that the operation be postponed?'

'Not merely postponed. The whole idea must be abandoned. One does not operate unless there is something on which to operate—not if one is an honest surgeon.'

'I will let that remark pass, Father Pyotr, though I would remind you that this is my room, and that I have allowed you to use it for practices that would not raise my standing in the eyes of the medical profession. I am concerned only with Natalia Ivanovna's health—and life. You are prepared to take full responsibility for your advice?'

'Of course. One does not dispute the directions of God.'

I turned to the Grand Duchess who had listened to all this with a miserable expression on her face.

'Natalia Ivanovna,' I said softly, 'how can you listen to this man? Think of what I have told you and compare it with his advice. Think of the photographs which you saw only a little while ago in this very room. This man is a dangerous criminal . . .'

'Stop, George!' The Grand Duke held up his hand. 'How dare you talk like that of this holy man?'

'Persons do not concern me," I retorted. 'You understand, Ivan Pavlovitch, that if his advice is followed you and he may have a case of murder on your hands?'

Pyotr made the sign of the cross. 'Beware!' he thundered. 'Beware of the wrath of God!'

I turned on him savagely. I had had enough of his thunderings and his denunciations. 'It is you who blaspheme, not I,' I told him. 'You have no respect for the work of the Creator, and you substitute fake miracles for His reality, packed with the most glorious wonders. No, it is you who have to fear the wrath of God, not I, Father Pyotr. God is our conscience, and you know you dare not face yours, inevitable though the latter must be. My sole concern is with Natalia Ivanovna and her life, as I have just said.'

Pyotr folded his hands across his breast. 'Her life is her own,' he said unctuously, 'given to her by God to dispose of according to her desire. It is for her to choose whether she will follow the path of truth

pointed out by God's finger or be deluded by the petty tinkerings of man's puny brain setting itself above the wisdom of the Almighty.'

'Every one of us is here to further and preserve and renew his little life, which is also his greatest possession,' I said. I felt compelled to speak out, though I am not given to making speeches. 'Admittedly, some of us find strange ways of fulfilling this, the first item and the last in our destiny. We operate and shed blood to save life. We wage wars and kill in thousands so that the majority may have a chance of freedom and happiness. The end may not bless the means but it dictates them. So, Pyotr, where a life is at stake—and especially when that life belongs to one who is also my friend—I shall fight your murderous nonsense to the last. One of your kind once almost murdered the entire Russian people—one hundred and sixty million of them—but he is dead now, that charlatan, that moujik who became a Tsar's confidant. So, too, are his accomplices, innocent and guilty alike, the fools and the criminals. You still advise Natalia Ivanovna to abandon the operation?'

I felt weak after this long effort. I knew I was fighting for something, and I had put all I could into the words. Pyotr gave me one glance from beneath his eyebrows and then ostentatiously turned his back on me and addressed the Grand Duke.

'I have nothing to add to my advice, Ivan Pavlovitch, nor have I anything to take away. You had better go home with your dear Natalia Ivanovna.'

'Thank you, Holy Father,' replied the Grand Duke quietly. 'I have faith and shall follow your advice.'

I was losing the battle. I could feel my work slipping through my fingers. I told myself I was a fool ever to agree to this 'consultation.' Obviously I could never hope to master by words and reason a man who lived by the magic of words and the appeal to unreason. I said nothing and waited.

'Oh, Grandmother, I am sure Father Pyotr is right . . . aren't you?' said Dania, her eyes still wide and bright and never moving for long from the face of the holy father.

Natalia Ivanovna did not speak at once. She looked worn and weary. With a sigh and an obvious effort she turned to me.

'George,' she said, 'I do not know how ill I am. I know what you think and I have heard what the holy father says, and it is difficult to choose. But I do begin to understand how old I am. Now that I find myself once more in one of the hurricanes that used to keep me young, I feel only weak and tired and sad. The wind buffets

instead of stimulating me. I am a coward, George. Age is the greatest enemy of courage. I repeat I am a coward, and I wish to believe what seems so good and reassuring; and I also wish to obey my dear husband. You remember, George, I told you that. It is not unfair to stick to what I said, is it?'

There was a gleam of hope in her words. She hated making a decision and was seeking a way out. I resolved to help her as best I could.

'This is not a mere matter of obedience or fairness, Natâlia Ivanovna. I repeat again, as solemnly as I can, that there is one thing, and one thing only at stake: your life. Think of it before you do anything that might lead you to abandon what has always been so dear to you. Think of what it means not only to yourself but also to your friends.'

She smiled sadly and stretching out brushed my hand. It was like coming into a warm room after being out in the winter cold to feel that touch of sympathy and gratitude amid the chill airs of disapproval and lack of understanding.

She looked at her husband. 'Ivan Pavlovitch?' she said.

I knew I was defeated. She appealed not to a judge but to a hostile witness.

'Let me take you home, my dear,' he said.

'And Dania?' she asked.

The last flicker of hope died in my breast.

'Why should we doubt where faith has succeeded so often before?' said Dania primly, her eyes on Pyotr.

'And you, Holy Father?'

Pyotr bowed his head. 'Can you weigh the word of God against the word of man?' he growled.

'You see, George?' she said despondently.

'I have just this to say, Natalia Ivanovna. If you postpone the operation—if it is not performed within three or four weeks at most—I refuse all responsibility, and I shall not be able to regard you as my patient any longer.'

She nodded and rose. 'Take me home, Ivan Pavlovitch.' Her sad smile lingered on me for a moment. 'I am sorry, George.'

I watched them go. I did not accompany them to the door. My last glimpse of them was the vision of Father Pyotr's broad back encased in its voluminous robes passing like an ebony shadow through my doorway.

Chapter 3

Kiev, 1911

When they had all gone I sank into a chair. The whole business seemed to me a nightmare and I did not know whether to believe it or not. Here was I, a surgeon in the heart of London, living in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, and I had had my professional opinion flouted by a charlatan, whose methods were based on all the superstitions of the Middle Ages. And those who had accepted the opinion of this magician in preference to my own were my friends. My patient was one whom I had known from childhood, a lady to whose case I had given great labour and thought. I did not mind having my advice criticized, I regarded the case as of so much importance that I would have welcomed the collaboration of a colleague. That was a point I had stressed over and over again in that extraordinary interview. But what had happened was that my patient—my friends—had listened to superstition before science and had even shown annoyance and dismay when I had not been prepared to admit the superiority of a faith-healer's knowledge to my own.

From the point of view of my ordinary daily practice, it was fantastic, incredible, ridiculous. It was the sort of thing that no-one in his senses could credit. But to me it was not wholly unbelievable. I had been switched back from Harley Street in the nineteen-forties to the Russia of the nineteen-tens. When I had opened my door that morning to the Grand Duchess and her 'adviser' I had admitted the past. It was a different world in which I had lived for an hour or so. In the old pre-revolution Russia the sort of thing I had witnessed had been the commonplace of everyday life rather than the bizarre. 'Holy Russia' as a whole had been untouched by the breath of scientific life. She possessed knowledge, so she said, that was not to be found through the methods of the laboratory and the clinic. She lived in an atmosphere of revealed truth, not discovered truth. Her holy men knew because the Unseen had told them so, and they had no need of long, arduous research. And even her greatest surgeon, as the Grand Duke had reminded

me, had not thought it incongruous to seek supernatural guidance for his knife. The more extravagant a man's claims in those days, the greater his success was likely to be, and it was not among the ignorant peasantry, who showed when the Revolution gave them the opportunity that they possessed an abundant stock of common sense, but among the so-called educated classes—the Court and the aristocracy—that these healers found their chief support.

In those days, into the sumptuous, cultured homes of the great and wealthy came a procession of the ignorant, the mentally defective and the unwashed. Silk-covered chairs were soiled by filthy robes, and the lips of princesses dwelt on grimed, unmanicured hands. Perhaps it was all the last extravagant efflorescence of a morbid and destructive growth of the soul of a nation . . . .

My thoughts went back to that vanished Russia which some, like the Grand Duke, still tried to keep alive in alien soil. Though I had been only a boy I remembered so much of it. The pictures of those days were not photographed on my memory but etched into it with a mordant that had fixed them there indelibly. I started calling up these pictures of the past, surprised myself at their clarity and their detail. At first they came in no particular order. It was like turning the pages of an album at random, but at last I became interested and began to sort them into a coherent sequence. The figure of the Grand Duke re-appeared again and again. The men and women who peopled them are to-day for the most part characters of history, that grim, incredible history of the decline of Tsarist Russia.

It was at Kiev that it all began, Kiev that has always had a mystical significance in the story of Russia and is a symbol even in these days when Russia has become the bloodiest and greatest battlefield the world has ever known. I was there as the guest of Prince Boris Alexander Wengerov, whose estates were vast and magnificent. That, at any rate, was my nominal status, but in reality I was spending the autumn of 1911 at Kiev because the Prince's son, Alexander, was my room-mate at the Naval Academy at Kronstadt. For two years he and I had eaten together, worked together, slept together. The previous summer he had spent with me at Samarkand. Now in turn I was his guest on his family's estates. Nor was the connection one of recent making. Prince Boris Wengerov knew my father well and the two men had served together in the Imperial Hussars. This link had been important. Without it, it is very doubtful whether I should have been allowed

to spend this autumn holiday with my friend. But when I wrote to him and told him I was not coming to Samarkand but going to Alexander's estate near Kiev, my father gave his permission at once. No doubt he missed me, but he realized I was in safe hands, and he knew how much the company of Alexander meant to me. I considered myself lucky and looked forward to weeks in a boy's paradise. I did not know, when I set out so happily for Kiev in the company of my friend, that I was to be a witness of one of the strangest tragedies of Russian history.

Certainly I could not have guessed it from the events of the first two weeks. The time simply flew and seemed no more than a couple of days. The Prince was stern but just. He understood boys and he gave instructions to his staff to see that every reasonable whim of ours was gratified. If some things had been made taboo to us we did not fall foul of them. We had ponies placed at our disposal, and we had miles and miles of open country to explore, to say nothing of opportunities of displaying our horsemanship. There was a broad, handsome river that provided us with ideal bathing. These were only some of the delights and we passed the whole day pleasing ourselves.

But from the first one thing had been strictly enjoined on us. We could go where we liked, do what we wanted, provided we were always punctual for lunch. Though no threats were made I realized that to fail in this would be a very serious offence indeed, and Alexander, knowing the ways of his father, did nothing to persuade me that this edict could be ignored. So every day we tore ourselves away from our riding, our bathing, our boating, our diversion of the moment, to present ourselves at the appointed hour.

Those functions bored me stiff. Every day there seemed to be some new guest, for the Prince entertained continuously. One day it would be a director of some business concern in which the Prince was interested. The next day we would be presented to an Army officer straight from Petersburg, well primed with the latest stories of the Imperial Court. Every so often a high dignitary of the town of Kiev was the guest of the day. The Prince cast his net wide. I was unable to discover at the time whether he did this entertaining all the year round, but I think now, throwing the light of later knowledge on the scene, that September, 1911, when I was at Kiev, must have been a special occasion.

It was to be a bloodied date in Russian history, the pages of which have been so often stained red with the life stream of victims,

innocent and guilty. And it was ushered in with a display of pageantry in the best Russian style.

During that September Kiev was to celebrate the unveiling of a monument to Tsar Alexander II. Gigantic festivities had been planned, not merely in honour of the occasion itself, but also—and principally—because the ceremonies were to be performed by Nicholas II himself. The Tsar was to be accompanied by his two eldest daughters. Ministers of State, high officers of the Services, dignitaries of all grades and shades were to be present. It was a high light in the life of Kiev. Every house had to be pressed into service to accommodate the invading hosts of visitors. Hospitality was to be dispensed with a lavish and tireless hand.

Naturally a great deal of the responsibility for making the arrangements fell on Prince Boris Wengerov. He was one of the outstanding notabilities of the place. He was a retired General of the Imperial Army. He had close connections with many of those who would attend. He had placed his house at the disposal of a number of high officers, and making arrangements for their reception alone was a formidable task. Besides this, he was deeply involved in the general planning of the affair with the municipal authorities of Kiev.

Excitement reached a climax on September 10th. On that day we were solemnly told that the Prince's house had been selected to receive Lieutenant-General Kurlov, Imperial Master of the House of Romanov. The Prince accepted the news with mixed feeling. He was honoured by the selection, but he was not so sure about his guest. Kurlov had a dark and adventurous past. He had been concerned with a good many of those odd affairs that punctuated the history of the time in Russia. But that was not the chief objection. Kurlov was the supreme chief of the Okhrana, the Secret Police, and had shown himself an extremely able and merciless executive. The Prince no doubt felt that the presence of this official beneath his roof might attract unwelcome attention to his house. Besides, I gathered the impression that he did not like Kurlov personally, and I am firmly convinced that had etiquette made it possible the Prince would have declined the somewhat dubious honour thrust on him.

The news made great commotion in the household and became the chief topic of conversation. No-one guarded his tongue in the presence of us boys and we were able to piece together something of the life story of General Kurlov. It was of a kind that appealed to our young imaginations.

Kurlov had first attained fame—or notoriety—during the abortive bloody revolution of 1905, when he had led a punitive expedition against the rebellious peasants. He had interpreted his orders liberally, and the expedition had become noted as one of the most sanguinary of its kind, even by the standards then current. He fell from the Tsar's favour and disappeared from the public eye.

Destiny was influenced by curious forces in the Russia of those times. Kurlov formed a mysterious friendship with Badmaiev, a Tibetan 'miracle man', who gained renown in Petersburg by his alleged healings and inspirations. Through this link Kurlov found himself drawn into Rasputin's circle, and that dark spirit resolved to interest himself in the general's affairs. He did so to good purpose. In 1910, Kurlov was appointed Master of the Horse and was restored to the Imperial good graces. His special abilities won for him shortly afterwards the post of Supreme Chief of the Okhrana.

Kurlov had enemies in high places as well as friends. A bitter enmity existed between him and Peter Arkadievitch Stolypin, the only good, wise, intelligent Prime Minister to hold office under Tsar Nicholas II. That Stolypin was head of the Government did not dismay Kurlov. On the contrary, he saw in it an opportunity to advance himself. He knew how deeply Stolypin, because of his liberal and reformist views, was hated by the Court at Petersburg. This gathering at Kiev, so rumour said, was to be utilized by Kurlov as the departure point for a brilliant future. It would bring together all the elements opposed to Stolypin and also give him, Kurlov, very close access to the Tsar, whose life would be in his charge during the whole of the festivities.

Rumours multiplied in the house and all were freely discussed. To us boys, sitting quietly by while our elders talked, it seemed as though we were on the verge of exciting happenings, and our hearts beat faster. Nor do I think that if we had had the gift of seeing into the future we would have realized how much was at stake.

Not all the visitors to the house were of the same sinister brand. On the contrary there were some who were to remain in friendship with me for many years afterwards. Among these was the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol, and his charming Grand Duchess, Natalia Ivanovna. They were among the best known and most respected families in Kiev, and their connection with the Wengerovs had been long and lasting. It was they who carried with them the first presaging echo of the coming storm. Every

noble family in Kiev, they said, had heard the rumour. There must be something in it.

The fourteenth of September had been fixed as the day of the great parade. On that day Kiev was to be *en fête*. The Imperial troops would pass before His Imperial Majesty, and Kiev would bid welcome to the Tsar of all the Russians. The review was not to be confined to the military, however. The children of Kiev were to march before their ruler, and the visit was to be rounded off by a gala performance at the municipal theatre.

Everyone knew this, of course. These arrangements had been made a couple of months before, and Prince Boris had played a big part in attending to the details. It was the date that was important. The Grand Duke Pavlovitch insisted on this. On that day, he said, certain people had planned to assassinate Stolypin, the Prime Minister. A mere boy, I knew little of Stolypin, still less of the tortuous paths of Russian politics. I only know that my pulse pounded with excitement. Assassinations were things one read about in the newspapers or heard discussed in a matter-of-fact way by one's elders. Now, it seemed, I stood a chance of being an actual witness of one! I wished Stolypin no harm, but it would be an amazing adventure.

On the morning of the fourteenth everyone was agog with excitement. What would happen? Was this rumour just one of the many that were floating round or would it prove, for once, well founded? At luncheon, which Alexander and I dutifully attended, the Grand Duke brought fresh news. That very morning at seven o'clock, he reported, a famous secret service agent had been seen to enter the office of the Governor of Kiev. General Kurlov had been hastily summoned and a long interview had taken place.

The Grand Duke had his own private source of information. The agent, he said, had brought news that a woman had arrived in Kiev with the confirmed intention of assassinating Stolypin. There could be no doubt about it. The rumoured plot, then, was a fact.

In Kiev itself there was something like consternation. The nobility had laid themselves out to do proper homage to their Emperor and were aghast at the prospect of having everything spoilt by an assassination, even if its victim was not in any special way dear to them. Moreover, Stolypin held his office from the Tsar himself, and any blow at the Prime Minister must be, therefore, a blow at the Tsar. The Governor lost no time. He went straight to Stolypin and warned him of the plot. What happened at the interview we did not learn.

Meanwhile an emissary arrived at Wengerov's house and remained closeted with the Prince for a considerable time, while the whole household hung breathless on its upshot. The news was not reassuring. The prince had been asked to organize a force of special police and secret agents to guard the Prime Minister's life. It was an onerous responsibility, but the Prince accepted it in good part. He took immediate and energetic measures. The police were not to leave the Prime Minister's side for an instant. He was not to venture abroad without an adequate escort. Stolypin, the Tsar's chief adviser, became from that moment a prisoner of his own government. More important even than guarding Stolypin, the capture of the criminal was made a positive task. To this end, the secret service agent who had brought the first authentic news of the plot was put in charge of the police. He said he could recognize the woman. If she could be brought to book, it was felt, the safety measures could be relaxed and the events could proceed according to programme without fear.

This affair had a profound effect on the Prince. He sincerely believed that a serious plot by revolutionary elements was afoot. The ruling caste were living on the edge of a seething cauldron and had come to be suspicious of everyone and everything. The Prince's apprehensions were fully shared by the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch, who appointed himself the Prince's chief aide in protecting the Prime Minister. On their advice the arrangements were modified, and the Prime Minister was recommended not to attend the public functions arranged in daylight. It was at such events as these that the assassin raised his pistol or threw his bomb. They were regarded as times of great danger to those who attracted the attention of the political murderer. Even the parade of the schoolchildren was suspect. Stolypin insisted on attending this, and terrified both the Prince and the Grand Duke by what they were convinced was rashness rather than courage. Together they thought of all kinds of plans to protect him, and they even went so far as to suggest that he should occupy a seat in the Imperial box.

Stolypin glanced at them with a smile.

'I should be deeply honoured to do so, gentlemen," he returned. 'May I take it that you will intercede with His Majesty and procure for me the necessary invitation?'

The Prince looked at the Grand Duke, who returned the look with a shrug. It was impossible, of course. Not even the Prime Minister was likely to be admitted within the sacred confines of the Imperial

box. Stolypin decided to accept the police advice and remain at home under surveillance, though it was clear that the decision irked him.

In the excitement of the parade Stolypin was forgotten—at any rate for those of us youngsters who were impressed by the glitter and pageantry of the marching troops, the magnificent horses, and the fine panoply of rich uniforms. To the majority it was an entertainment in itself to be able to obtain a distant glimpse of the Tsar himself, watching the show from the Imperial box, which was well guarded by sentries and police.

The day drew on and event succeeded event without any untoward incident. By the evening the alarm and suspicion had dropped altogether from our minds, except for the worried expressions that still sat on the brows of the Prince and the Grand Duke. They were obviously in the throes of intense anxiety, and it was not until the day was done and we were all gathered together again in the Prince's great house that they allowed themselves to relax.

September 14, 1911, had passed without incident. The whole affair had been just a scare. There was an air of relief in the house that night.

Chapter 4

Stolypin

Day succeeded day and on each the festivities rose to new heights. Kiev had once been the capital of the Muscovite Empire. Its cathedral of St. Sofia was the cradle of the Eastern Orthodox religion, the source from which the river of Christianity had flowed all over Russia. But probably never before had it known so much pageantry and pomp packed into so short a time.

All this, of course, greatly attracted us boys. We were here, there and everywhere, and our connections with the Prince gave us the entrée to everything we wanted to see or hear. We felt that in some way the show was ours. The Prince, my friend's father, was one of its chief sponsors, and the Grand Duke his close friend, was one of the most important persons not only in Kiev but in the Empire. At those interminable luncheons and dinners, to which we were invariably commanded, we heard all the inside gossip of the affair.

On the fourteenth, the scare about Stolypin had obscured all else. It had been Stolypin, Stolypin, Stolypin, all the time. But when nothing happened he dropped from the conversation and in a couple of days his name was barely mentioned. Nonetheless, elaborate police precautions were maintained. The Prince felt that the measures taken might have frightened off the assassin from his or her original plan, and the would-be murderer might be trying to lull Stolypin's protectors into a sense of false security.

So the grand fête mounted to its climax which was scheduled for the evening of the eighteenth. This was the special performance at the municipal theatre in honour of the Tsar. The audience was hand-picked. It was in no sense a public celebration, as the parades and reviews had been, but rather a special tribute from the nobility of Kiev to their ruler.

When the Prince told us that we two boys were to form part of his suite, we were highly delighted. Neither of us had expected to be so honoured, and I especially as a visitor with no special claim on Kiev had never even thought of being present. I could hardly contain myself. The day seemed endless as a prelude to the night's revelry.

I can remember the care with which the invitations were issued. They went out on the recommendation of the Governor of Kiev himself, and that dignitary spent a long time discussing names and claims with the Prince and the Grand Duke. There was not only the problem of the composition of the audience: the order of seating had to be arranged so as to cause no unpleasantness or dispute over precedence. The question of Kurlov caused some trouble. As a member of the Tsar's entourage he had to be invited, though both the Grand Duke and the Prince would, I am sure, have liked to exclude him. But eventually they allotted thirty-six seats in the pit to the general and his staff. Their presence was necessary not only to satisfy the demands of etiquette but also to ensure the safety of the Tsar and the leading figures of the Court and Society.

The glitter of lights and jewels, the babble of talk, the brilliant uniforms and the no less brilliant dresses of the women—all these quite turned the heads of young Alexander and myself, used though we were to the excesses of Russian entertainment. I cannot recall whether it was the first time we had ever been to a theatre at night or not, but certainly it was our premier attendance at a gala performance honoured by the presence of the Tsar and members of the Imperial Family.

The entry of each newcomer was like the appearance on the stage of some star actor for whom the audience had been waiting. As each notable figure was ushered to his appointed seat, the talk was hushed for a moment and heads were turned. There was subdued comment. And then the general buzz broke out again, until the arrival of the next guest caused the whole procedure to be repeated.

When the Tsar stepped into the seat in the Imperial box, the audience, now standing, broke into a spontaneous cheer. The orchestra and the special children's choir started the National Anthem, and there was a sharp click as the heels of the audience came to attention. The Tsar and his two daughters stood for a moment, smiling and bowing. They seemed genuinely delighted with the scene, and the happy smiles of the audience showed how much this mark of Imperial appreciation was valued.

It was difficult to pick out all the notabilities in that brilliant throng. In the front row I could see the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch. Beside him sat Stolypin, who was flanked on his other side by the General Court Minister. I was rather surprised to notice that General Kurlov, Chief of the Okhrana, had been moved up so that he sat immediately behind the Prime Minister. It looked as though

even here no risks were being taken. For a moment I wondered whether some fresh news had come to hand, but the thought was soon lost as the orohestra began the overture. A hush fell over the house. The lights went down. In a few minutes the first act of the opera was in performance.

I cannot even remember what opera it was, though no doubt the dusty pages of the history books and the archives would tell. But I do not wish to bring these into my memories, which are better left uncoloured by outside information. All I can recall of that first act is that it seemed to me something enchanted and not of the everyday world. The splendour of the scene had overpowered my young head and heart, and no doubt I would have been as profoundly impressed if the performance had consisted of a juggler from the local fair and a peasant orchestra of balalaikas. I have seen opera many times since in the great capitals of the world, but the glamour of none has lasted as has that of the gala night at Kiev three decades ago.

I think the audience, too, for all its sophistication, had been a little overborne by the atmosphere. When the curtain fell on the first act there was quite a pause before the usual hum of talk broke out. It was as though all were awakening from some magic sleep that had to be shaken off slowly and luxuriously. But when the spell was broken there was a scene of great animation. Everyone was moving about and seemed to be greeting everyone else. It was a memorable occasion.

A boy's fancy is easily caught, and although I find it difficult to explain, despite the magnificence of the audience in general, my attention was focused on a man who rose from the twelfth row and began slowly to work his way along the crowded aisle. He was in simple evening dress. No orders shone on his breast. Perhaps it was the very commonplaceness of his appearance that attracted me. With difficulty and many bows and apologies he made his way to the front row and approached Stolypin.

My keen eyes saw an expression of dismay pass across the Prime Minister's face, and he seemed to shudder. But it was only momentary. He recognized the man and nodded. I, too, recognized him, for he had been pointed out to me on the fourteenth during the height of the alarms. He was the secret service agent who had brought the news of the alleged assassination attempt and had been placed in charge of Stolypin's safety. Perhaps it was the reminder of his danger that caused Stolypin to wince at the sight of this official.

For a minute the two men stood looking at each other. I saw Stolypin's expression change. His eyes travelled downward to the man's hand. I think I must have seen what he saw at exactly the same instant, for as I gasped aloud so did Stolypin's face go white. In the agent's right hand was a revolver, and it was levelled straight at the glistening tunic of the Prime Minister.

Two tiny puffs of smoke rose from the muzzle of the gun. The sound of the shots was almost inaudible, and probably the majority of the audience did not hear them amid the ceaseless din of the crowded theatre. But the shrill piercing scream that followed rose above everything. A deep silence fell on the house like a blanket.

Whence that scream came, no-one ever discovered. Probably it was some woman, her nerves already overwrought by the impressive atmosphere of the gathering. But it was certainly not Stolypin. He was standing there silently, looking a little dazed. Then he bent his head with surprise and stared at the red spot that was slowly spreading over his white uniform.

When the agent had approached him he was holding a glass in his hand. He now turned and placed it on the barrier beside him while with his left hand he clutched the back of the nearest seat.

It was a tense moment, and the scene is one that could never be forgotten by those who witnessed it. It had a paralysing effect on all those present. No-one moved to Stolypin's aid. No hand was held out to support him. No-one rushed forward in an attempt to stem the flow of blood that was slowly turning his uniform crimson. He stood like some actor caught in a spotlight, an actor of compelling power who forced all eyes to be turned on him. The house remained taut and breathless.

His voice, rather high-pitched, rang clearly throughout the auditorium.

'I am proud to die for the Tsar!' he shouted. And with a last courageous gesture he raised his left hand and tried to bless his Imperial master with the familiar sign of the Byzantine cross. But he was already too weak. Too much of his life blood had ebbed from him. As he raised his hand he seemed to crumple up. A moment later he toppled to the floor.

The Tsar looked down from his box, standing in an attitude of military attention, looking straight ahead of him as though he did not wish to meet the eyes of the dying man, which were glued on the Imperial figure.

Pandemonium broke out. Police rushed forward and formed a cordon round the body. Women fainted. The gala performance was at an end.

The horror of the assassination was on everybody's lips. It had been a callous and brutal affair. But what dismayed most was the identity of the assassin. This was no revolutionary, no illiterate peasant drugged with the false gospel of liberalism and anti-imperialism. The man was one of Kurlov's own agents, a trusted man who had come hot-foot from Petersburg with faked news of an assassination attempt. General Kurlov himself had been responsible for suggesting that this man should be put in chief charge of the Prime Minister's bodyguard.

What lay behind it? That was the question all were asking. It was discussed again and again in the house of Prince Boris Wengerov, and we boys, going from group to group, heard all the various views. The Prince himself was shocked beyond measure. He felt that he himself had been betrayed. He recalled bitterly the indifference of the Tsar and the dying loyalty of the murdered man. To him it was clear that both the Tsar and the police chief knew of the impending assassination and, for certain reasons that seemed good to them, took no steps to avert it, even to the extent of allowing the assassin a special right of access to his victim.

Others went further, and I never heard the Prince try to contravert them, so it may be they expressed a view he thought it better not to voice himself. These alleged that General Kurlov had himself been responsible for the attempt.

These opinions, even when they implicated the Tsar himself, had plenty of evidence to uphold them. It was soon spread abroad that the Tsar had refused to see his dying Prime Minister, who was found to be still alive when brought to the hospital. The programme of festivities was renewed on the morrow, and there was no sign of mourning or regret among either the Court or its attendant officials. While the Prime Minister Peter Arkadievitch Stolypin breathed his last in the Kiev Hospital the final grand parade marched past his Imperial Majesty and his suite.

Much speculation centred round the fate of the assassin. It was felt this might give the solution to the mystery. Why had Stolypin been killed and at whose instigation? The answer to the first part of the question was not so difficult. Stolypin had been a reformer and an honest man. As a result he had ensured the enmity of the self-seeking groups and cabals that flocked round the Throne. Few

regretted his passing, though the Prince and the Grand Duke were deeply and genuinely distressed. But which of these warring groups was the actual culprit?

The time was now fast approaching when Alexander and I had to return to the Naval Academy, and we were anxious to hear the last of the affair before we returned to circles where the repercussions of political events like this were barely felt. We knew we had a good story to tell our comrades and we wanted to be able to round it off properly.

It seemed at first as though our wishes could not be fulfilled. Most people began to think that the assassin would just disappear and that the affair would end as mysteriously as it had begun. But in the end these views proved mistaken. Just as we were preparing to leave for the new term news came through that the assassin had been condemned to death. There had followed violent scenes. Till the very last moment he had expected to be reprieved, and he would not take seriously the assurance of his jailers that nothing was being done to stay the date of execution. He had pleaded and cajoled. He had stormed and threatened. He had appealed to Kurlov, who had turned a deaf ear. When this failure was reported the murderer appealed to the Tsar himself. But all was in vain. If the Tsar and Kurlov were glad to see the last of Stolypin, the one man who might have saved Russia from the impending disaster of war and revolution, they were not prepared to associate themselves publicly with his assassin; nor were they ready to give the crime their official benediction.

At last the criminal was brought to the scaffold. The Grand Duke took special pains to have a report sent to him of the man's behaviour. Almost with his dying breath the man denounced the infamy of his superiors in allowing him to suffer for a crime that was not really his. He was a police agent, he had said, and in shooting Stolypin he had acted on orders, carrying them out without question as any good police agent must. If he had questioned them he would have been convicted for mutiny. Now he was to die for doing his duty. The injustice of it all appalled him. But he died, for all his cowardly attack on the Prime Minister, like a brave man.

Alexander and I were too young to understand. In the long winter evenings at the Naval Academy we tried often to pierce the mystery that surrounded the death of Stolypin. Under the influence of the Grand Duke and the Prince, Alexander's father, we had been taught to regard Peter Arkadievitch as a great man and one who

was destined to play an important part in the history of Russia. That he should have been murdered, apparently with the passive consent of the Tsar himself, seemed to our logical boys' minds almost incredible. For then we believed that those who ruled us had nothing but the welfare of Russia at heart. We had yet to learn of the corruption in high places that was to doom the Russia we knew and that was to lead eventually to our bodily exile from the land of our birth though never to our spiritual excommunication from it. As we studied our navigation and our seamanship, our naval history and our drill, we did not realize how much there was hidden from us beneath the glittering surface of the dark morass of Imperial politics.

In less than three years, though we did not know it, there was to be war. In little more than five years, though we did not know it, there was to be a revolution that would tear up by the roots the parasite growth that was strangling the strong Russian tree. We told our story to our comrades and enjoyed the réclame it brought us. It was perhaps lucky for us that neither of us had the gift of prophecy or second sight. Russia, then, remained for us an enduring entity that would last for all time. And when we thought of 'Russia' we thought of the Russia we knew, with its Tsar and its Court, its Patriarchs and its monks, its wealthy landowners and its poverty-stricken, illiterate peasants. There was nothing else for us to know.

Chapter 5

Imperial Court

My memories of that scene in the theatre were so strong that I could almost see again that red stain growing on the spotless white uniform of the murdered Stolypin. I was back once more in the past, living anew an experience that was all the more vivid to me because it had been imprinted on the clean sheet of a child's mind. But I was actually in the present, in 1941, in a period that had banished Tsars and that was fighting for the principles of freedom and the cause of the common man.

I thought of the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch as he was then, a leader of liberal reform, an upholder of the hated Stolypin, and an opponent of the miserable intrigue of the Court; and compared that enlightened figure with the man I had seen and talked to only a short while ago: a man who did not scruple to call in superstition to controvert science and to sacrifice his beloved wife's health—perhaps her life—on the altar of a misguided and irrational faith. It was a terrifying comparison. But I could understand it. I had grown up in the atmosphere that bred that kind of mysticism, but I had escaped from it young enough to feel the impact of the truth and to see the futility of it in the light of western ideas. Moreover, I had seen the whole rotten fabric of Russian Imperialism crumble, to be replaced by another system that, for all its faults, had raised the common people from the level of farmyard stock and given them a pride in their own country and its achievements.

But it was not so with Ivan Pavlovitch. He was already an integral part of the system when it was swept into ruin. He had left his native land not, as I had done, to seek a career and make a new life, but simply to regret the old and to pray for its restoration. With each passing year, the nostalgic appeal of the past had grown stronger, till even the evils that, in his younger days, he might have deplored now seemed to him attractive and the right way of living. He had supported Stolypin because Stolypin had had a chance of grafting the inevitable new ideas on to the still living, though moribund, plant of the old. To Ivan Pavlovitch the crime of the 1917 Revolution was not so much that it had brought new ideas

but that it had uprooted the old in their entirety. He could not see the withered tree that had been thrown aside; he could remember only the bright blooms he had seen on that tree in his youth.

The corruption of the Court of Tsar. Nicholas II is now well known. It has become the symbol of intrigue revolt, and catastrophe. The Tsar himself is seen as a weakling trying to be a man of iron, a man seeking always for some counsellor whose views he might put forward as his own. But he was not just a weak-willed man born to assume responsibilities he was incapable of bearing. He only continued and extended a system that he was powerless to break. He was caught in the net of Destiny.

Critics who know little of Russia speak of the evil influence of the Tsaritsa on the Tsar and of her predilection for the occult as a paralysing factor on Russian statesmanship. But there was nothing new in all this. Ever since the Romanovs had mounted the throne there had been a tendency for the Supreme Ruler to believe in miracle-workers and soothsayers, in quacks and charlatans, and the same indifference to their credentials. It did not matter if they were sincerely deluded, misguided, or intentional frauds: provided they were impressive enough they held the key to the Tsar's secret councils.

In the days when Moscow was still the capital of the Tsars, holy men, miracle workers and fools had crowded the dark places of the Kremlin. And when the capital moved to Petersburg the whole motley throng followed. It may be that Petersburg was Russia's window looking on to Europe. It was a dirty window, grimed by the fog of folly and superstition from within. And in any event a window is a barrier, enabling those behind it to gaze out on a scene but forbidding all contact with it. The window of Petersburg was never opened wide enough to allow the purifying breath of truth to blow round the befogged minds of the Tsars, their Courts, and their governments.

These Tsars, these Romanovs, believed implicitly that the cripples and the imbeciles, the deaf and the dumb, were singled out by God to be His messengers, and were in specially close contact with the Heavenly Power that was behind all Russian philosophy. Nicholas II, ill-starred and marked down by Destiny, the thirteenth and last of his line, was no exception. How could be believe or practise otherwise than his fathers had, since his power, as theirs, was derived direct from the Almighty? He believed that he, too, enjoyed the

special blessing of Providence, which sent him divinely inspired counsellors to lead him in the path of truth and holiness.

The Romanovs ruled for six hundred years. In that period there were many changes. Outwardly parts of the old Russia were swept away. The ancient order was altered again and again, till even the ingrained principle of serfdom was abolished. But these were only material changes. Inwardly the soul of the Russian people remained immutable, clinging to its old beliefs, asserting to itself that it was the specially loved of God, the custodian of the original faith that the heretics of the West had turned into a philosophy of worldly wisdom.

For six hundred years the Romanovs reigned. And during the last decade of those centuries as in the first, the *juroiovi*—the cripples and lunatics—had wandered the broad steppes of Russia, giving tokens of divine favour, invoking blessings, and giving glimpses of the spiritual world. They invented many mysterious and ecstatic rites. Some taught mutilation as the path to grace. Others insisted on the necessity of gross and perpetual sin so that redemption might be earned. There was not one of the fantasies of the Thebaid that did not find its counterpart in Holy Russia; and to these were added many others of native growth.

The Court Clergy, the Fathers Confessor of the Tsars themselves, the bishops and the priests throughout the land—all these had fostered and preserved the mystic belief in the powers of the *juroiovi*. Such a faith, rooted in history, part of the national inheritance, is difficult to disavow. Perhaps the hands of Lenin and Stalin have swept it at last from the Russian soul. But it still lingers in those scattered shards of the Old Russia which have been thrown far and wide across the world by the explosion of the Revolution. And the survivors of these mystic brotherhoods still wield power in limited ways, are still absolute in coteries where once they swayed a nation's destinies.

One of the most remarkable features of a fantastic situation was that a sincere, deeply ingrained mysticism like this was allied to a determined use of it for purely material ends.

The nobility, place-hunters and power-seekers, utilized the clergy to their advantage in every possible way. The man who could introduce a new miracle-worker was already well along the path to fame, honour and reward. Often the beautiful salons of the Imperial palaces at Tsarskoe Selo were crowded with the latest candidates for mystical advancement.

For the most part these half-pathetic, half-tragic figures were imbeciles, who threw themselves into the most horrible convulsions and gave vent to inarticulate gibbering. Their heart-rending and nonsensical shouts were listened to with the closest attention by prelates and priests, nobles and courtiers. Each cry, each wail was held to have some inner significance. But its true meaning, its real value was for the emperor himself. He, as the most Orthodox Tsar, held undisputed sway over all the powers of native men and native magic. The priests held that he had to abjure all western spiritualism and philosophical doctrine and believe only the signs vouchsafed to him by his own afflicted countrymen. Thus, even while implying that these ignorant idiots were more divinely blessed than they, the priests managed to retain a stranglehold on the Russian government. For if the imbeciles had in them God's message, it was left to the priests and monks to interpret it for the ear of the Father of All the Russias.

Never before, probably, had so strange a mixture been seen at the seat of one of the chief modern governments of Europe. Above all, of course, towers the figure of Rasputin, one of the greatest enigmas of the century, a man who combined everything that was rascally and self-seeking with a genuine and fervid concern for the welfare of his country as he himself saw it. Rasputin was neither imbecile nor epileptic. He had a shrewd and calculating brain, and whether he really believed in his own alleged mystic powers or merely assumed them to gain his own ends must forever remain a mystery.

He was not the only one who swayed the Tsar's destiny for better or worse. Father Pyotr, the adviser of the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch, was another, the last of those who swayed opinion throughout Russia, from the highest to the lowest. Father Pyotr was not above bringing his own creatures to the Court to bolster up his power and increase his prestige as a custodian of the divine message. There was the notorious example of Mitja Koljaba, whom he himself introduced to the Tsar. Mitja had been found in the neighbourhood of the monastery made famous by Dostoievsky, Optina Pustynj.

The picture of this mystic is revolting enough and gives a good idea of the monsters who were put forward as inspired counsellors of the Tsar. He was bowlegged and misshapen, and very nearly a complete mute. For arms he had merely two stumps, and his eyesight was so defective that he had to be led everywhere he went. He was deaf, too, and when he opened his mouth he uttered sounds

of the most horrible kind, articulated in painful gasps. He was the victim of frequent epileptic attacks, during which his voice changed from a mere whimper to a sinister bellow like that of an enraged animal—a sound that increased until it grew to a roaring and baying, unnerving and fear-inspiring in its intensity because of its very inhumanity. While he was in this state he would add to the general impression of horror by flaying his deformed arms. Only those with the strongest nerves could endure this macabre sight or even remain in his presence for more than a few minutes. Yet Mitja's animal mouthings were held to be the vehicle of God's message to Russia, and he was regarded with awe and reverence.

Not long after Father Pyotr had brought this miracle-worker to Tsarskoe Selo, the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch sponsored Darja Ossipova, one of the few women mystics who attained fame. She, too, was epileptic, and during the course of her attacks she would utter prophecies, chant mysterious formulae, and throw out the most terrible curses.

The Tsaritsa, though not a Russian, was one of the most ardent supporters of this mob of the deformed in mind and body. She read deeply the theological writings of the Orthodox Church, and accepted whole-heartedly the belief that these idiots were mediators between God and the Tsar. With the Tsar, she watched closely every twitching, every grimace, and every gesture of these creatures and listened raptly to their howlings, their bellowings, and their screams. With the Tsar, she wrestled unceasingly to wrench from these exhibitions some secret meaning that was to affect the course of Russian history and establish more firmly the hold of the Romanovs on all the Russias. It was not surprising, then, that a never-ending stream of bare-footed, unwashed friars, possessed pilgrims, and inspired cripples and morons, found its way to the imperial palaces. Toward all the Tsar maintained the attitude of one who was a ruler by the grace of God and a special sharer of divine secrets.

That these envoys of God gained so strong a hold is undoubtedly due to the Tsaritsa. She gave her soul to them completely, and it was through this obsession that one of the most mysterious chapters in the history of modern Russia came to be written. As the years went by the power of the mystics grew greater and greater. Experience with them and of them became an end in itself and of the utmost spiritual importance and with a direct bearing on practical affairs. Their alleged messages were interpreted and faithfully obeyed. The rule of unreason became paramount.

Physicians were dismissed and their places taken by men who claimed to have inherited the apostolic therapy of the laying-on of hands, or had studied the esoteric medicine of obscure Asian cults. Ministers fell and generals were sent into exile because some imbecile had uttered a mysterious warning or prophecy. The whole system is so extravagant that it is almost impossible to believe that it all happened only thirty years ago.

But it was not so totally irrational as it sounded or appeared on the surface. Through the Tsar's faith in the mystic and the Tsaritsa's complete acceptance of inspired messages, all manner of people managed to gain temporary control of Russian affairs. No matter how the imbeciles might mouth or the epileptics display signs and wonders, an interpreter was needed; and that interpreter was usually a sane man of the world with a shrewd idea of what he and his friends wanted.

The most dangerous were, of course, men like Rasputin and Father Pyotr, neither of whom was bodily or mentally deformed. Both claimed mystic powers and both were able, clear-minded men. Father Pyotr spoke for the mystic clergy of the Church, and in doing so he had more power and authority than any court of law.

In those amazing days he was concerned with many curious adventures that sound like the imaginings of a diseased fiction writer, but they are well and indisputably authenticated. With him the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch and his Grand Duchess were closely associated. Of my friends and my family at this time only one stood out for the philosophy of reason and was bold enough to challenge openly the fantastic pretensions of the clergy and their attendant mystics. That was Prince Boris Alexandrovitch Wengerov. He used all his not inconsiderable influence to purge the court of these evil influences and risked his position many times by his uncompromising opposition to the ridiculous state of mind that regarded an idiot's babblings as of more weight than a stateman's and an illiterate monk's prophecies more important than a trained soldier's. But his was a voice crying in the wilderness. His words and advice were ignored but not unheeded. Eventually he incurred the disfavour of the Tsar, one of the first fruits of which was that his son, my friend Alexander, was obliged to leave the Naval Academy. Thus, the influence of these soothsayers extended even to determining the careers of the rising generation and was powerful enough to take control of private family affairs.

It was a hard parting from Alexander. Neither of us could understand the turn of events, but already we had imbibed that national fatalism which accepts that in Russia all things can happen. In Petersburg were powers that could not be denied. That was the basis of our upbringing, and though we regretted the decision we did not feel we had the right to question it or challenge it.

The Imperial Court of that time is to-day incredible. Even to me who, as a boy, saw something of it at first hand, it seems to belong to a nightmare world of unreality. But I had fresh evidence now that its influence was still alive, if only on a small scale. Why should I wonder at the Grand Duke's subservience to the opinions of Father Pyotr when he had all his life supported that priest and aided him in his career? It was I who was being unreasonable in expecting anything else. So far as the case of the Grand Duchess was concerned I was up against forces that no amount of scientific argument could dispel. I might as well talk to a brick wall as try to convince the Grand Duke that my knowledge was equal to the task of disputing Pyotr's findings. Whatever I did he would fall back on the stock contention against which there could be no rational appeal. "Man's knowledge', he would say, 'cannot be put against God's. Those who try to do so are blasphemers.'

Blasphemers! Which was the greater blasphemy—that of the man who determined the nature of illness by a parlour trick and condemned a woman to almost certain early death, or that of a man who in all humility was prepared to give every ounce of his skill in an effort to preserve God's gift of life to man?

And the greatest tragedy of all was the Grand Duke and his fellows could never learn from experience. They had seen an empire and a political system brought to ruin by belief in the power of mystics to stay the march of history. They had lost their all in the process. But still they believed, still they longed and worked for a re-establishment of a system that had betrayed them. They had lived for a quarter of a century in lands where survival is seen to be a matter of science, not spiritualism; and they held aloof, believing, like the Pharisee, that they were not as other men, and that it was the rest of the world who walked in darkness while they alone held the light.

My thoughts alternated between the Russia of my youth and the problems of to-day. Though the first seemed so remote, they were still influencing the latter. I could see I was in an impossible position. Perhaps with one of the younger set, with whom this fakir business was little more than a traditional ceremony, like the English Christ-

mas, I might have stood some chance. But I was dealing with the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol, a man who had by his iron determination persistently fixed on misguided ends played a decisive part in Russian history.

His career epitomized his generation. It was the story of a class faithful to their own interests because they believed whole-heartedly that those interests were identical with Russia's. Theirs was a kind of altruistic egotism, a selfless selfishness. They loved the Russian people in the same way as a stern father loves his children. But they had no understanding. Always their acts were based on the inspired messages of God, against which there could be no appeal. They brought war. They brought poverty. They brought revolution. They were driven from the land they loved and in which they were rooted. But still they believed in their divine right. Still they believed that the happiness of Russia depended on them and their kind. They did not learn, not because they could not but because they would not. Those who have truth revealed to them have no need of study or reflection. The history of the Grand Duke shows it.

Chapter 6

Last of the Romanovs

On July 22, 1914, one of the grandest reviews in Russian history took place in the spacious palace grounds at Krassnoje Selo. An event in itself, it was also an omen of the destiny of Russia. Whole divisions had been massed to take part in it. Crack troops from all over the empire had been assembled. The most illustrious officers wore their most resplendent uniforms. The Tsar himself was to take his place at the head of his army and lead it past the saluting base. No-one heeded the warning of experience that practically every grand event with which Tsar Nicholas II had been associated had ended in tragedy. Fate never smiled kindly on the last of the Romanovs.

But if the future was mercifully veiled, most people realized the significance of this great affair. It was a symbol of the concern of Russia not traditionally with herself but with the affairs of Europe as a whole. Its immediate cause was the visit of the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré, to the Russian capital. It sealed the Entente—no-one dared to call it an alliance—between Russia and France and implicitly with Great Britain. Rumours of war already darkened the air. The Triple Entente was the reply to the Triple Alliance. Russia, France, England—these three arrayed themselves against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The seeds of war had been sown in the forcing 'ground of 'vital interests'. All that remained to be seen was how soon the seed would spring up and yield its dark flower.

At the head of the Provincial Kiev Division was General Prince Boris Wengerov. The Imperial Hussars were commanded by H.I.H. The Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol. There was no contingent that had not its important commander. The domination of the nobility was clearly demonstrated.

The spectators were hardly less distinguished than the assembled leaders. In the Grand Stand sat all the members of the Imperial Government as well as the leading figures of the Court and Church. Foreign diplomats focused the eyes of the world on the scene. The festivities to honour this occasion had been planned on the most

gigantic scale. The mere fact that the Tsar was a participant instead of a spectator indicated the importance of the moment.

His Imperial Majesty, mounted on a magnificent horse, rode past the Grand Stand. Immediately behind him came a carriage drawn by horses of the purest white and bearing the Tsaritsa and the little Tsarevitch, the tragic heir to the throne of the Romanovs. The Imperial Anthem was played and followed at once by the Marseillaise, a public tribute to the new solidarity between the autocratic Empire of the east and the free democratic Republic of the west, the one an upholder of tradition, the other then the leader of revolutionary thought. The Russians chanted a national hymn that was a prayer to God. The French sang a marching song that exhorted revolutionaries to fill the gutters with aristocratic blood.

Even the magnificence of the display and the lavishness of the entertainments that preceded and followed it failed, however, to obscure the question of the moment. Would there be war? Was all this the colourful prelude to the more sordid drama of hostilities? What was brewing in the secret seething vats of the chancelleries of Europe?

Queer things were happening. It was widely known that the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch had prevailed upon the Tsar to enter into personal correspondence with the Kaiser in an effort to avoid a conflict that everyone recognized would be a world-wide calamity. The Tsar had pleaded and threatened. He hoped in his heart that war would not come. Yet he did not convince even himself. So much was obvious to anyone who had his ear attuned to palace gossip, as I had at that time through my friends. His mind was made up and he had set the seal on the tragic bond he had made with destiny. Some curious spiritual forces persuaded him of the coming disaster and his own miserable fate. His fragile form was symbolic of his inability to carry the enormous weight of his responsibilities.

The lights faded on the brilliant scene and night fell on the palace. It came down like the black wings of an eagle, the sinister bird of war. Just before midnight the Tsar, superciliously punctual, retired. It was a signal. The time of merrymaking and celebration was over. A new and more terrible phase was beginning.

Midnight had scarcely chimed when an excited courier arrived at the palace. The telegram he held in his hand has become one of the documents of history. It was addressed to His Imperial Majesty. The signature it bore was that of another monarch, also

the second of his name and the last of his line—Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia.

'If Russia mobilizes', it ran, 'the entire weight of the decision rests upon your shoulders and you will be responsible for war or peace.'

Perhaps the language was intentionally brutal, designed to cow a naturally weak and vacillating man. Perhaps it was merely the natural tone of one who upheld the German policy of aggressiveness. If this was the answer to the Tsar's pleas, it was uncompromising. The responsibility had been shifted to the shoulders least able to bear it, the decision passed to a man to whom all decisions were distasteful.

The Tsar was tired after a trying day of splendour. He slipped into his bathrobe. He read the decoded slip and sighed with an expression of dismay on his face. Then he turned to the telephone which, like all the appointments of the Imperial palaces, was loud in its magnificence, an instrument of ivory studded with diamonds. He asked to be connected with Suchomlinov, the Minister for War.

'Suchomlinov,' he said, 'can you hear me and understand me clearly?' He spoke like a man who does not want to have to repeat what he has to say. 'I am giving my commands. I direct you definitely to revoke the mobilization immediately and cancel all arrangements made in connection with it. Please repeat that.'

The War Minister gasped. He had to face an impossible situation. He protested with what power he could command, but he could not dispute an Imperial decree issued in that way. He spoke of Russian honour and prestige. He stressed the catastrophe that was likely to occur if the command was carried out. But the Tsar was obstinate. He was never strong, and like many weak-willed people often mistook stubbornness for decisiveness.

'Will you please repeat my order,' he commanded, interrupting the flow.

He listened as the dismayed Suchomlinov obeyed. Then he nodded, replaced the receiver silently, and returned to his bed. He had made his choice and his part was played.

But there was consternation in the War Ministry. The Minister sent urgent messages to the generals and informed them of the course of events. He did not hide the fact that he regarded the whole thing as preposterous.

And those Russian generals who, later, were to gain sensational

victories and follow them up with defeats almost more sensational were with him. They wanted war. They had worked for this mobilization and they would not see it dispersed at an Imperial whim. Something had to be done to save the honour of Russia in the eyes of the world. Within the Russian Empire was one-sixth of the world. Could they kow-tow to the ruler of an upstart neighbouring country that had not achieved even an appearance of unity till 1870—less than half a century before?

Somehow or other the Tsar had to be persuaded to change his mind. He had changed it before: revoked decisions, made new edicts. He could do so again. He must do so again. The generals were insistent. They wanted war. They had to have war. What was the good of all their preparations if this sort of thing could happen? And at last, after much argument, much sending out of couriers, and much discussion with government departments, they prevailed on the Foreign Minister and the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch to intercede with the Tsar.

It was a powerful deputation they sent. The Foreign Minister knew his master. The Grand Duke was close to Nicholas in blood and friendship. They talked to him. They pleaded with him. Even, perhaps, they resorted to strong measures cloaked beneath respect for the Imperial power. And at length the last of the Romanovs gave way.

Once again he picked up his jewelled telephone. Once again he asked for the Minister of War. Once again he gave his commands. But this time they were different. The mobilization was to stand. War was inevitable. Russia must be prepared. And while he took that step, challenging the lessons of history, the common people throughout Russia prayed in their poor churches for peace and for blessings on their Imperial Master, and Nicholas signed the proclamation. They rose from their knees, and the young men among them collected their small belongings and made their way to their depots.

The war cloud spread rapidly westward. Belgium, France, Britain lay beneath its shadow. Soon it was to cover almost the entire world.

The grand parade in July had been symbolic of a country massing for war. In August occurred another event that was also symbolic, but this time of the decline and death of a system. On the eighteenth of that month the Tsar entered the Hall of St. George in the Kremlin, the historic seat of Russian government, to which in the hearts of the people St. Petersburg had ever been a faint shadow. As he

walked in the roof vibrated with the terrific cheering of the crowds. It was here that Russian history was always made. Here a hundred years before Alexander I had declared war on Napoleon.

He was greeted by the Archbishop of Moscow who, holding the Cross of Michael, the first of the Romanovs, in his hand, bowed low before the Tsar. The emperor crossed himself and then kissed the crucifix. He passed into the deep shadow of the cathedral; and with him passed his throne, his line, his heritage. He was dedicating himself to a policy that was to lead to the death of the Russia he knew and the extinction of his own immediate family.

But none knew it then. Through Russia, on the broad distant steppes, in cold and miserable cells, in huts, in churches, the custodians of the Russian soul prayed and uttered prophecies. Miracle workers gave signs; imbeciles gibbered; idiots threw themselves into fits. Rasputin prayed. Father Pyotr prayed. The blessing of God was called down on the Tsar and his country. Its future glory was foretold. But none hinted that all this Russia would pass away in three years' time. None told of the horrible carnage that was to stain the Russian soil. None prophesied that the Tsar himself would totter from his throne to stand before a firing squad. . . .

There is no need to dwell on what is now history. The tale of the disastrous campaigns of the Russian Army, the lack of decision in its leadership, and the final blunder when the Tsar assumed personal command, has often been told. But the facts of the Tsar's abdication from the throne that his family had held for centuries are not so widely known. What happened was this.

On Friday, March the ninth, 1917, a message reached the Tsar informing him that his children had been stricken with measles at Tsarskoe Selo. He was wholly concerned with this news, but those around him, the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch, Prince Boris Wengerov, and the more level-headed, young or old, of the courtiers, were concerned with other matters. To them it was clear that the end had come, that the crazy race which had been running was at an end. Revolution was inevitable. And it was not to be simply a local rising. It was an assertion of the people's soul, a revolt against charlatanry, self-interest, criminal folly, and ineptitude.

In Petersburg there was a rising that could not be quelled. The arrival of fresh troops merely fanned the flame and added to the ranks of the insurgents—for the army was losing its discipline and deserting not singly but *en masse*.

At nine o'clock that evening, when the Tsar was still worrying

over his children, Prince Boris Wengerov was appointed second in command to General Ivanov who had become dictator of the capital. The stage was set for the final act. Four days later the Tsar left the Front. On the fifteenth he was closeted with his ministers, listening to the growing reports of the revolution. The Tsar was a weary, depressed man. For the first time perhaps in his life he saw clearly what must be done. Without fuss, without bother, at ten o'clock that night he signed his abdication. The lights of the Romanovs flickered and went out.

A few faithful generals immediately offered their services and their loyal troops to suppress the revolution. There were still many who could not accept this decree of the emperor as final. Russia depended on the Tsar. Without the Tsar Russia and all that Russia stood for would be lost. For hours the Grand Duke Ivan and Prince Wengerov besought the Tsar to change his mind. But for once Nicholas stood firm. It may be that he was too tired and dispirited to care. In his faltering way he had striven to do his best for his people, and had blundered into excesses through the evil counsel of those who had not held the happiness of the people so important as their own advancement. He had failed. And that was enough. But it was now too late: all Russia knew of the Tsar's decision, and a public decision of the Emperor of All the Russias could not be rescinded. The Tsar stood up and looked at the assembly. Then, silently, he turned on his heel and left the chamber.

He did not leave without friends. There were still those who believed the trouble would pass, that before long, though not perhaps without tribulation, Russia would regain her head and her soul and turn again to the traditional ruler and father of her people. They had lived their lives divorced from the great tide of events that was sweeping the world. They deluded themselves in believing that whatever might happen in the West, however many old institutions might pass outside, the traditions of Russia were perdurable.

At eleven-thirty on the morning of March the twenty-second the Tsar arrived at Tsarskoe Selo. He stepped from the train accompanied by a few of his loyal friends—friends who were ready to renounce everything for his sake. The little company, met with none of the accustomed pomp and ceremony, made its way to the waiting motor-car that was to take the emperor to his family.

As he put his foot on the running-board of the car a shot rang out. Whether it was intended for the Tsar no one can say, but if it was it missed its mark. The Tsar turned his head slowly, wonderingly,

asking himself perhaps whether even now his troubles were not at an end and his body no longer the target of the assassin's aim.

Something fell at his feet and he looked down. It was the lifeless body of his faithful friend, Prince Boris Alexandrovitch Wengerov, the general in command of the faithful grenadiers of Kiev, a man who had once offered advice that might have saved the throne, but who had suffered for it in disgrace and disfavour. Now, when the Tsar had dropped to the nadir, this man was not only by his side but was giving his life for the ruler who had despised his counsel and preferred that of the demented and the inarticulate.

That death was one of the tragedies of the Revolution. The Prince had been one of the few selfless men around the throne, one of the few who attempted to throw light into a darkness that had become stygian. He held faith in Russia, in the happiness of her people; but his faith was centred in the Tsar. Though the revolutionaries might bring all the blessings of paradise to Russia, he would not be with them, because they had denied the pivot of the Russian State, the person of the imperial ruler.

And to me it was also a personal tragedy. I had loved and respected this brave, determined man. I had learnt many things from him. Most of all I cherished his son and heir, Alexander, who was now without a future and who, at fifteen years of age, could not see the reason for this senseless dying, this insane turmoil of politics and ideologies, which sought to bring happiness by bloodshed and promised an Eden by smashing up all that had seemed good and holy to millions of Russians. The revolution took much from me, much that now I cannot regret. But it also took from me a man who in any land and under any system would have been a fine example for a growing boy.

But Alexander was not left friendless and alone. The Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch adopted him and took him into his home. His fate was bound up in theirs, and it was to be so throughout the bitter period of the civil war.

Chapter 7

Court Martial

The Revolutionary Civil War is one of my bitterest memories. In it I lost almost everything that the old Russia had given or could give, the good as well as the bad. In it, too, I found my soul and my destiny, and that is the one thing perhaps for which I can be grateful. But luckily it is not necessary for me to dwell on the harrowing details of my experiences—memories that even now cause me to shudder. All war is brutal, but none is so barbarous as that in which brother kills brother. It is the fiercest and most merciless. Those who condemn the terrible excesses which civil war brings forth are precisely those who fail to appreciate that it is, even more than international war, a form of mass hysteria. Nothing but psychosis would drive men to kill their fellow countrymen.

My story here is the story of the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch and his companions. I wish to tell how they came to be what they are and how it was they believed the strange, odd things they do believe.

In common with most of the Army leaders, the Grand Duke threw himself into the campaign against the Bolshevists. He fought here, there and everywhere, and in 1918 found himself in command of the White Russian Army opposing the Red Army in the South commanded by Voroshilov, one of the men who were to make the Red Army the efficient fighting machine the Germans did not expect to find. I, too, served on various fronts and in various ways, as I have told elsewhere. Now and again I was able to be in the company of my friend Alexander who, at eighteen, had been given a commission in the White Army and was serving with the forces under the command of General Alexei Skoblin. It was during the battle of Orel that I saw the first act of a drama the dénouement of which was not to be known till twenty years after.

At that time, the White Army under Skoblin had advanced to within sixty miles of Moscow. The ancient capital of Russia was threatened then as it has often been threatened in Russian history and was to be threatened again. The key town of Orel was taken

and the White forces, as Hitler and his generals did in 1941, felt that the capture of the capital was now only a matter of time.

Energetic preparations were being made for the final assault, and hopes ran high. If only Moscow could be taken, it was felt, the White cause would be far advanced, for the Russian people would accept the symbolism of the event. Whoever held Moscow held the key to the dominion of Russia. In a few days' time the White Army would sweep forward victoriously and clear this unorganized rabble, infused with non-Russian ideas, from the land.

But the Bolshevists were tenacious, if unorthodox fighters. They were not prepared to let the White forces make their plans in peace. Patrol activity was constant and guerrilla bands, poorly clad and worse equipped, preyed constantly on the White units. Prisoners were constantly brought in and nowhere was the savagery of civil war more obvious than in the way these captives were put to death on the slightest pretext. They were traitors and mutineers. None of the usages of civilized warfare in regard to prisoners applied to them. Equally, of course, soldiers of the White Army knew that for them, too, there would be no quarter.

In one of these encounters the White forces captured about a score of prisoners, including not only officers and men of the Red Army but also a few civilians. Among the latter was a woman well known to many, who had lived a fashionable life in Petersburg and Moscow—Katerina Plevitzkaia, a famous soprano. Her presence among the Red Partisans was, of course, the subject of much interest, and she was closely questioned by important officers. These men, who had been close to the Imperial Court, felt personally insulted that one whom they had patronized should go over to the bloodstained foe.

Perhaps they had some idea that the promise of a return to her old life would soften her and make her see the error of her ways. But she was adamant. She refused absolutely to talk, and though she did not incriminate herself or admit that she was an agent of the Reds, she would do nothing by word or deed to assist the White officers, who felt she should be a natural ally. At last they lost patience with her. The very fact that she maintained a passive attitude condemned her in their eyes. If she did not assist the White Army, the cause of the Romanovs, and the crusade for the life of Holy Russia, she must be a traitor. It could not even be urged in her favour that she was an illiterate peasant misled by crafty

foreign agents. Everyone knew that Katerina Plevitzkaia had mixed with the cream of Russian society. Everyone knew that she was an intelligent woman. There was nothing at all to save her.

Together with the other prisoners with whom she was captured she was condemned to death. Orders were given to a platoon to execute the sentence. There, in the opinion of the officers, the matter ended. It was a normal procedure. If prisoners would not recant and come over to the White cause, their end was inevitable.

But they had counted without the spirit of weariness and disgust which was already rising in the younger members of the White Army. It so happened that the order for the execution was given to the platoon under the command of Alexander. His face turned black with disgust as he read his orders.

'I can't do it,' he said to me in dismay. 'It is just murder. One shoots spies and franc-tireurs, yes. But there is nothing to convict these people. I cannot order my men to kill a woman, above all.'

I nodded. Already I, too, was coming to this point of view. All this blood-letting was just madness. Whatever successes the White Army might gain, they were fighting for a lost cause. There was something elemental about the fury of the Red soldiers and their enthusiasm for their cause. Against it, all that the Whites could oppose was a nostalgic love of a Russia that everyone could see now had been corrupt and rotten. I did not like the Reds. I loathed what they stood for. But I could see, as Alexander did, that the day of privilege was over and that we were trying to subdue by force a violent upwelling of the will of a people long inarticulate and deserted by those who should have studied their welfare instead of their own.

Alexander, with my support, sought out his company commander and told him that he refused to carry out the sentence. The officer looked at him in astonishment.

'You understand that this is something more than insubordination?' he asked. 'It is mutiny. There will have to be a field court martial. If you are adjudged guilty you will be shot. It is the inevitable penalty for refusing to obey an order on the field of battle.'

Alexander did not even blanch. 'I am ready to face it. Better to die with clean hands than to live with hands stained with the blood of my countrymen.'

'Well spoken!' I cried. 'I agree with every word you say.'

The company commander looked at me. I was not really under his jurisdiction, for technically I held rank in the Navy. But this was war—and war without any real central organization.

'You are an officer in the Imperial Service,' he said sternly. 'You must stand trial with this deluded young man for aiding and abetting him.'

We were marched off to the guard-room and placed under an armed guard. It was clear that we had the sympathy of many of the men, for our sentries did all they could to make our incarceration pleasant. We were allowed all sorts of privileges that a prisoner awaiting field court martial should not enjoy.

When we were summoned to the court, however, we knew that we had been judged in advance. We were greeted with cold and hostile looks and I knew at once that whatever we might say, the verdict would be the same. Instead of commanding a firing squad Alexander would face one; and in all probability I should as well.

The proceedings were merely formal. Alexander's impassioned reasons were listened to, but no heed was taken of what he said. The President of the Court swept his arguments and pleas aside. The young lieutenant had committed a very grave offence. It was bad enough for anyone to disobey orders given by a superior, but for an officer to refuse to shoot traitors merely encouraged disaffected men to take liberties. We were not fighting a foreign foe, but were trying to stamp out those who were spreading poison among the Russian people. If anyone refused to play his part in doing that he was as much a traitor as those he refused to exterminate.

We listened to this harangue in silence. There was a pause and the President looked at Alexander first and then at me, no doubt expecting some outburst. But we stood erect. Speech was useless. We had to save all our energies to receive the sentence of death he was clearly on the point of pronouncing.

'The penalty for this offence is, as you know full well, death,' he went on. 'There can be no escape from it. And you, Sava,' he added, turning to me, 'though you are not strictly under our jurisdiction, must be adjudged equally guilty. You are an officer in the Imperial Navy and you have supported this wretched youth in defying authority on the field of battle.'

I bowed but made no comment, and he continued:

'Very well. The Court will not pronounce judgement now, however. I am anxious you should realize the full gravity of your offence

before you die. We have been informed that our commander-in-chief, General Skoblin, will be with us this evening, and I think it will impress you more if you hear sentence from his lips. You will return to the guard-room, where you will wait in irons. But do not think that this short reprieve opens up any hope of mercy. It may well be that the general will deny you even the right of soldiers—to be shot—and order you to be hanged like the common criminals you are.'

We were taken away. The officer's last words had terrified us. We were prepared to be shot. It did not matter to us much whether we were shot by a Russian in the uniform of the White Army or one who wore the insignia of the Bolsheviks. But we did not relish the prospect of being hanged. And we took that threat quite seriously. General Skoblin was known to be a stern and merciless man. He would have no kind feelings towards traitors—and that is what we were in the eyes of the White Command.

I began to wonder whether our protest had been worth while. The prisoners would be shot in any event. If we did not carry out the order, someone else would. And now we were to lose our lives into the bargain. Alexander had been separated from me, for we had been put in charge of troops of a different unit from our own, and they were carrying out the court's instructions to the letter. Heavy irons were on my hands and feet, and I could do nothing but sit in a cramped position on the upturned bucket that was the sole seat in my cell.

When the summons came to General Skoblin's presence I was filled with dismay. I thought for a moment of throwing myself on his mercy, and demanding a trial by a naval court. But I knew he would interpret that as cowardice, which would make my offence worse. General Skoblin was not the sort of man to grant privileges to a craven.

At the door of the hut that served as headquarters, my guard joined with the squad in charge of Alexander. His head was held high, and though he was rather white there was no mistaking his intention of standing by the position he had taken up. There would be no appeals for mercy from him, and the sight of him gave me renewed courage.

We found General Skoblin surrounded by officers, including the colonel who had presided over our court martial. No-one looked up as we were brought in, and for a little while we stood apart with our guard while the little group pored over maps and papers.

At last Skoblin nodded and made a sign for us to be brought forward. I did not like the look on his hard face. His eyes seemed to bore through me. Staring at us in silence for a while, he then ordered all but two of his own staff to retire.

'I have heard the charges made against you two gentlemen', he said coldly, 'and also the findings of the court martial. It is a very serious offence to be charged with disobeying a superior officer, and it is very bad for discipline when an officer from another service lends his authority to such an act. It pains me, Alexander Wengerov, to find you in this position. I knew your father well, and studied with him at the Imperial Academy at Moscow. You have risked a severe penalty, and you must have done so in full knowledge of what it was.'

He paused and ran his eyes over Alexander and me. Neither of us replied. We could expect no mercy from a man whose eyes were as cold and piercing as the Arctic ice.

'But there are times', he went on, 'when even a junior officer may see things a little more clearly than his superiors, and it should be the duty of a commander to see that honest initiative is not crushed by blind obedience to regulations. For that reason I have given serious thought to your case. We are not fighting an ordinary war. We are fighting our own countrymen, and in such circumstances much is done in passion that would not be done in the course of a war against some foreign invader. I have reviewed the whole of the facts as presented to me by the colonel. I admit their gravity, but I hold that your action was justified. There has been too much spilling of Russian blood in this campaign. It is our duty as the custodians of Russia to see that no life is unnecessarily destroyed. It is our unpleasant duty to fight against those in whose veins runs the same blood as ours, but it is not our duty to try and match the murderous actions of the foreign agents who have incited our people to rebel. In this case a woman was concerned. Soldiers do not kill women unless there is the clearest evidence that they are spies.

'We are not a revolutionary rabble,' he went on hotly. 'We are Russian soldiers, and we must uphold our high traditions. We can leave it to politicians and anarchists to kill for the sake of killing.'

I looked at Alexander and he looked at me. We were both stunned. We had never in our wildest dreams expected to hear words like this from the lips of the hard General Skoblin. As he had spoken to us his tone had become more and more friendly.

Alexander was about to speak but Skoblin signed to him for silence. He had not yet finished.

'So far from condemning you or confirming the sentence of death that the court recommended, I can find it in me to commend you. You have acted with courage and honour. You have not scrupled to place your lives in jeopardy in order that justice, as you saw it, might be done. I shall, in fact, issue a special order commending you for your action.'

'Thank you, Excellency,' murmured Alexander, too overcome to say any more.

'And I am directing that the civilian prisoners against whom there is not any obvious charge shall be released. The others together with the soldiers shall be treated as prisoners of war.' He smiled very slightly. 'But it is lucky for you that I happened to be coming this way. If it had not been so, you would indubitably have been shot.'

'Thank you, Excellency,' repeated Alexander. Like me, his good fortune had made him tongue-tied.

The irons were removed from us and, saluting smartly, we withdrew. Outside we received the congratulations of some of the younger officers, but the company commander and the colonel were obviously incensed, and I felt it would be better for us to transfer elsewhere.

Skoblin's action was at first greeted with incredulity by the majority of the mess. They could not understand it at all, and there were plenty of rumours to account for his unaccountable action. One thing, however, emerged clearly. He had a personal interest in saving the lives of the prisoners, for as soon as they were released Katerina Plevitzkaia became his guest. Some said she was his mistress and that he had hurried to the battalion headquarters as soon as he heard of her capture. But there was no doubt that he was on very friendly terms with her.

This development added to the flood of gossip concerning Skoblin. Many said he was losing grip, and that he was prepared to turn Bolshevik provided they promised him the women he wanted. Others maintained that really Katerina's silence was due to her being a White spy, and that she was bound not to reveal her true status to any but commanders-in-chief.

What concerned Alexander and me, however, was that we were free and that our action had been upheld by an authority against whom there was no appeal. Though we were frowned upon by the

senior officers, we were left alone, for Skoblin remained with us and they dared not flout his orders. The men and the younger officers sided with us, and to them we became objects of hero worship.

In the next few days rumours and gossip were forgotten. There could be no denying Skoblin's energy in preparing for the imminent assault on Moscow. He altered the plans that had been decided upon some days before and ordered an entirely different line of approach, no doubt hoping to take the Bolsheviks by surprise. The camp was in a turmoil. Supplies were brought up. Couriers, scouts, and messengers were going and coming at all hours of the day and night. In the general bustle the case of the prisoners was forgotten, and even the colonel found occasion to praise Alexander for his tireless work, in which he did not spare himself for a moment.

Next day the attack began. History records what happened. The offensive, which had seemed to be so carefully prepared, became a fiasco and developed into a rout. Skoblin's army was rolled up, broke and fled in disorder. Where he had thought to spring surprises he found the Red defenders in greatest strength. His forces were overwhelmed. First of all the leadership collapsed. The men, some of whom fought stubbornly to the last, were confused by constantly conflicting orders passed to them by officers. No-one was in command for more than a short time.

At last the condition so worsened that even the most optimistic abandoned hope. The army fled. It made its way southward to the Caucasus, harried at every step and undergoing the most horrible privations. Finally the remnants of the force that was to re-establish the Romanovs and recall the Tsar reached the Black Sea and managed to make its way to Constantinople.

From that moment the White Army ceased to exist, and though there was still to be much fighting the Bolsheviks established themselves in control of Russian destiny. The pathetic residue of Holy Russia had been rolled back to Constantinople whence Holy Russia had originally come. Moscow had been the new Byzantium. Its makers—or their descendants—had fled to the old Byzantium, now under the rule of the infidel.

But I was not concerned with these ironies of history. I was immersed in personal loss. I had managed to escape and find safety, but what had happened to my friends? I had last seen Alexander leading a forlorn hope against a strong Red force that was beleaguering the post of which he was in charge. He had

sent me on a scouting expedition with a couple of men, and I was not near enough to spring to his side when, with an encouraging shout, he led his pathetic little party over the top.

I knew he had become convinced the day was lost, that nothing now could restore the Russia he had been brought up to love and that had held for him everything that was worth living for. I believe that when, revolver in hand, he had sprung over the parapet and hurled himself on the waiting enemy he had never intended to come back.

He was the last of his line and he had decided that his line should perish honourably with all that it had stood for. Death to him among the fields and people he loved was better than life in exile.

Perhaps he was wise. Perhaps it would have been better for most of those who snatched safety in exile to have died as he had died. They, the White Russians, have carried Russia across the earth. They have become dress designers, waiters, taximen, rugby football players, *souteneurs*, tailors, and labourers. They have taken with them the fragments of a corpse, which they have mistaken for the living thing, and called the living thing—the New Russia—the corpse. They are in all lands but of no land.

I have been one of the lucky ones. I found a career, and fate has treated me kindly. I have adopted and been adopted by a new country that I can call my own, and found that country fighting side by side with rejuvenated Russia that has risen from the ashes of the old—and fighting for those things which I hold most precious.

But for many it has been tragedy. They are like swimmers caught in a strong current and hampered by impedimenta they cannot throw away. The spectre of the dead Russia haunts them day and night. In their hearts they know that it can never be again. But they hope—that awful hope of the hopeless, the absurdity of which is forever lost in its pathetic tragedy . . .

Chapter 8

General Skoblin

The battle of Orel probably decided the fate of the revolution. Certainly it was the last of the main campaign. But it was also the beginning of many new battles. Why had the Imperial forces, trained, disciplined, led by professional soldiers, failed so ignominiously before an army composed of all manner of elements, without proper equipment, and under the command of amateurs? Most White Russians shrugged their shoulders and pointed an accusing finger at Skoblin. 'Incompetent,' 'Too unorthodox,' 'Rash,' these were some of the epithets hurled at him. But all agreed that it was bad generalship that had lost the battle. The real reason did not emerge till nearly twenty years after. It was so fantastic that even I, informed as I was of the occurrence by those most closely connected with it, could hardly believe it at first.

A long series of events was to lead to the final discovery. It is better to describe them first than to anticipate the climax.

When the Civil War had been decided in favour of the Bolsheviks, Russian émigrés spread all over the world. They went to China, to America, to England, to Italy, to Turkey. But most of all they went to France. Paris became the headquarters of the White Russian movement, the capital of the shadow government of Russia that admitted allegiance to the heirs of Nicholas II. It was here that the description *aristocrate russe* became synonymous with taxi driver. But however humbly the banished grand duke or count might earn his living he remained *l'aristocrate russe*. He would save his money for weeks so that every so often he might dine in ostentatious and lavish luxury on his native dishes. To his comrades he remained His Excellency or His Highness. His titles, his rank, his way of living, were his inalienable birthright.

And not all these émigrés were poor. Some had wisely put part of their fortune in British or American securities, so that when their estates were forfeited they still were far from poverty-stricken. Many of the more powerful families had friends and connections in international society who did all they could to rehabilitate the fallen.

The Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol was one of these.

He never knew the hard and bitter fight for existence at first hand which had been the portion of the bulk of his exiled fellow countrymen. He had migrated straight to England where he had taken up a position in smart society, that was to become firmly established even when the title of 'Grand Duke' lost some of its glamour. He, too, had suffered personal loss in the revolution. His only son had been killed in the fight round Moscow, though the news did not filter through till a long time afterwards. The daughter-in-law had managed to escape, and her daughter, the Princess Dania, had been cared for from her earliest years by the Grand Duchess. When the child was two the mother died on the Riviera. The story was a tragic one but not so tragic as those of many of the exiles who, losing all, found nothing in the whole wide world to compensate or care for them. The Grand Duchess' brother, Baron Markov, married a wealthy American. The family of Ivan Pavlovitch was, in fact, one of the most fortunate among the émigrés.

By 1925 the White Russians had established a complete organization with its headquarters in Paris. It was largely dominated by a military clique, among whom General Kutiepov was foremost. To him was assigned the title of commander-in-chief. His chief of staff and natural successor was General Miller. Prominent among this military caste was General Skoblin, who had settled in Paris and had married Katerina Plevitzkaia. He had managed to live down the evil thing that had been said of him after Orel, mainly by reason of his uncompromising silence and his refusal to discuss the matter. Skoblin was looked upon as a strong, silent man who had been misjudged in the heat of a catastrophe. If he had underestimated the strength of the Red Army, so, too, had every other general, including those of the intervening powers.

The non-military side of the organization was headed by the Grand Duke Cyril of Russia and by the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch, who travelled continuously between London and Paris in order to keep in touch with the affairs of the organization.

In nothing was this government without a country, this general staff without an army, more Russian than in its capacity for intrigue and mystery. True, its intrigue was now directed chiefly toward the affaire of the boudoir rather than the affair of state. But none the less, curious things happened in the best manner of the Imperial Court. Nothing showed more clearly that though these émigrés had lost almost all their material belongings they had not changed at heart in the least. In that, perhaps, lay the reason for the refusal

of level-headed people even to contemplate them as the nucleus of an alternative government for Russia.

One of the most mysterious incidents that befell the White Russian organization occurred soon after it had become firmly established. In 1925 or 1926 General Kutiepov, the commander-in-chief, disappeared completely. It was a cause célèbre at the time. The police were called in. Every possible inquiry was made. The result was nil. No-one ever saw General Kutiepov or heard of him again. A hundred explanations were invented to account for this extraordinary event, but as time went on they crystallized into two, and to this day no-one is able to make a choice between them.

The theory most favoured by the aristocrats, headed by the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch, was that the general had fallen a victim to Bolshevik agents. Some of them claimed to have information that he had been smuggled into Russia and there executed or put into a concentration camp in Siberia. The aristocrats argued that the Red Government was uneasy at the strength of the White Russian movement outside Russia, and planned to remove its leading figures one by one. This is the view that many of them still uphold, though there is little enough evidence to prove it.

The other theory is less charitable. Russians who had good reason to be sceptical of the good faith of the aristocracy and the military leaders put quite a different construction on the disappearance of the general. They alleged it had been a voluntary departure, and that the general had gone with a not inconsiderable proportion of the funds that supporters of the White Russian movement had subscribed. Upholders of this belief claimed that the general had established himself in South America under an assumed name and was living in comparative ease and luxury.

As to the story of kidnapping, they pooh-poohed it. They asserted that the general himself had caused the story to be put about to throw investigators off the scent and forestall inquiries while he made his getaway. This theory is as plausible as the other, the evidence in support of it as scanty.

One important result of this affair—a result that was to have far-reaching consequences—was the appointment of General Miller to fill Kutiepov's vacant place as commander-in-chief and of General Skoblin as second in command.

Events were moving swiftly on the continent of Europe. The rise of fascism brought hope to many of the White Russians. Here at last, they felt, was a movement powerful and determined enough to

overthrow the Bolsheviks and re-establish the autocratic rule of the past. So it came about that the advent of Hitler to power was hailed as a sign of deliverance. The Führer was hailed as a saviour no less by the White Russian generals than by the other reactionaries of Europe. His avowed hatred of Bolshevism sounded sweet to those who had had their power destroyed by the rising Red tide, and they threw themselves easily into co-operation with the underground forces that the Nazis were harnessing to their ends.

It was about this time that the eyes of the whole world were fixed in horror upon the Russian scene. Stalin had run amok—so the popular opinion ran. He was massacring his generals and advisers—even his old friends of the Revolution. It was a sign of weakness. He felt his power slipping and was not ready to listen to advice. Therefore he must eliminate all those who opposed his views.

That was, roughly, the judgement of the world at the time, and it was endorsed by the White Russians, who eagerly accepted any evidence of the unpopularity of the Bolshevist régime. Nor were they innocent of assisting Hitler in his schemes to sap the strength that Stalin had been slowly building up in Russia against the day when, as it seemed, the hostile western powers would challenge it.

Hitler's plans had been well laid. The world now knows how his fifth column brought France and Norway, Holland and Belgium to their knees. And so it might have been in Russia. There his agents worked unceasingly trying to capitalize the discontent that there must be among inferiors in any energetic government that pays more attention to results than to personalities.

In Russia, Hitler's chief ally was Marshal Tukhachevsky, the commander of the Moscow garrison. He fell an easy prey to the facile promises of Hitler's emissaries. To him was promised the dictatorship of Russia when Stalin was overthrown. He knew he could count on White Russian support if only he could make contact with the accredited leaders, and he watched with interest the plans grow for the final extermination of Stalin.

Thus it was that he eagerly embraced the opportunity of leaving Russia as the representative of the Russian Government at the Jubilee of King George V. He could go abroad without raising suspicion. Once there he could see the White Russian leaders and concoct his plans with them.

In London his behaviour was discreet, though he did see a few of the émigré leaders, including the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch. But it was in Paris that his chief work lay. As soon as his official

duties in London were finished he hurried across the Channel and sought out the White Russian leaders.

He saw everyone: Miller, Skoblin, and the rest; and he did his best to gain the support of his new master, Hitler. The generals were assured that in return for their support they would be reinstated in their wealth and position, that they would stand in places at least as honourable and powerful as those they had held before the revolution. No less, the aristocracy were to benefit too, though it was clear Tukhachevsky did not value their support as much as that of the generals.

Hopes ran high in Paris. At last the hour was striking. The weary years of waiting and praying, of planning and hoping, were at length to be rewarded. Russia was to be freed of the Red parasites who had sucked her blood for so long, and her rightful rulers were to go back. The whole misery of exile would soon be dismissed as an unhappy interlude.

Tukhachevsky left Paris with the blessings and greatest good wishes of his new White Russian friends. It may be that those same friends had their own ideas on the worth of the Marshal as a ruler, but if so they hid them. The first step was to set foot again in Russia. After that events could be left to take care of themselves. As his train sped across Europe so it seemed that the date of liberation drew nearer.

There was a rude awakening. Tukhachevsky had barely crossed the Russian frontier before he found himself under arrest. He did not know what to do. And when he heard that one by one his accomplices had been arrested also the whole bottom dropped out of his hopes.

The Moscow trials followed. To the world they seemed demented. Twelve generals, counting Tukhachevsky himself, fell before the firing squads. Hosts of smaller officials and officers went either to execution or to imprisonment. Famous journalists confessed their complicity in open court. A watching world turned its head aside with a self-satisfied sigh of 'I told you so'. Russia was still Russia—corrupt from top to bottom.

Only now is the wisdom of Stalin's prompt action seen. The German armies swept into Russia, but nowhere did they find a welcoming hand or hear a welcoming shout. They found a nation of steeled foes. For the first time the German Army had to fight on its merits, unaided by fifth column work behind the lines, unhelped by traitors in high places

The affair shocked and dismayed the White Russians who, alone in the outside world, knew the true inside history of the trials. They alone knew that the confessions were not faked but represented the cold, stark truth. Now they saw that their task was hopeless. Stalin's grip on Russia was not loosening, but was tighter than ever before. But they still persisted. And it was through their persistence that the reason for Tukhachevsky's sudden unmasking was revealed.

Hitler was still their hope, the arch-enemy of Bolshevism. They were still ready to parley with those who planned the overthrow of Stalin's régime. German agents flocked to Paris and made promises to them—promises they believed because they wished to believe them. And General Miller, commander-in-chief of the White Russians, had many an interview with these agents.

The general was uneasy. The sudden arrest of Tukhachevsky and the unmasking of the whole plot in such detail by the Soviet Government had unnerved him and caused him to look for reasons. For some time he had had his suspicions of his second-in-command, General Skoblin—suspicions that were not shared by those of his highly placed colleagues to whom he confided them. Skoblin, they said, was far too anxious to help in the work of circumventing Stalin. Besides, he still had the bitter taste of Orel to wash from his mouth. . . .

Still Miller's suspicions held. He resolved to take no risks with Skoblin, though he dared not accuse him openly. So when Skoblin came to him and told him a meeting with a German agent and a prominent White Russian from abroad had been arranged he was filled with apprehension. Before he left to keep the assignment he left a note with his secretary. It explained his position. 'If I do not return', it concluded, 'you will get information from Skoblin.'

Miller was not seen again. He disappeared as suddenly and as completely as General Kutiepov ten years before. But this time the explanation was not left entirely to the imagination of observers. The secretary, having read the note as instructed went to Skoblin.

'There is no news of General Miller,' he said significantly. 'Can you advise me what to do?'

Skoblin stared at him. 'Why should I? I know nothing of the general's movements.'

'But the appointment, Your Excellency, the appointment with X——. You yourself arranged it, and . . .'

Skoblin's face went blank as it always did when he was troubled. The secretary had not been quite clever enough.

'Did the general tell you, then?' he asked quickly. 'I asked him to treat the matter as confidential and inform no-one—not even you.'

'He left a note, Your Excellency, which was not to be opened unless he failed to return. He seemed to fear some untoward incident. That is why I came to you. . . .'

Skoblin rose. 'Leave it to me. I will see about it.'

He could see he was in a dangerous position. Miller had suspected him, otherwise why had he left the note? Heaven alone knew what other suspicions he had written down. Suspicion might not be proof, but it was very embarrassing, especially to a man in his position.

That night he left Paris; whether by air or train is not known. But he disappeared no less completely than his predecessors.

These disappearances could not be ignored. The French police were called in and the famous Sûreté went into action. It was not difficult to discover the truth, and the White Russian community reeled beneath the blow.

Skoblin's position was now explained. From the earliest days of the revolution he had been sympathetic with the Reds. He had walked deliberately into traps prepared for him at Orel. He had thrown an army away to further the cause in which he believed and, as he thought, save Russia from unnecessary bloodshed. But he had never revealed himself. He had kept always in the closest touch with the White Russian movement. Secret documents prepared by the émigrés had found their way through Skoblin's hands to interested eyes in the Kremlin. Conversations in Paris had echoed in Moscow through the sounding-board of Skoblin's secret despatches. While Tukhachevsky was speeding across Europe to depose Stalin, Skoblin had sent a coded message giving a list of everyone concerned in the plot—a list taken down from Tukhachevsky's own lips.

But the police could not lay their hands on Skoblin. He had gone, and rumour says that he found his way back to the Red Russia he had served for so long. They did, however, arrest his wife, Katerina Plevitzkaia, on charges of espionage, and later she was sent to prison for five years.

Intrigue and counter-intrigue. All the features of Imperial policy and practice were to be found among the White Russians of Paris. They were a narrow clique who could not change, who would not change.

I did not learn all this from the Grand Duke. He had been too closely concerned with the affair to speak freely of it. I could see it had troubled him deeply. He felt he had been betrayed and that

Skoblin was the worst sort of traitor, the type that denies loyalty to his own class and his own friends.

But I had one more personal interest in the affairs of this period. My uncle, General Alexis Ignatiev, military attaché in Paris at the time of the revolution, had always remained a Russian loyal to his country. When the government of the Tsar fell he stayed in France as an exile, but he would take no part in the political intrigues that beset him on all sides. With the White Russians he would have nothing to do, except socially. To the representatives of Soviet Russia he maintained an attitude of correct courtesy.

It was about this time that he received a message from Stalin. The Russian Army was being reorganized. Russia was being threatened by the growing power of Germany and needed every man. In particular she needed good and loyal officers. The message offered him a military post in Moscow with the rank of general.

He considered the offer and decided to accept. A family crisis ensued. It was preposterous that he should throw in his lot with the gang who ruled the Kremlin.

'I am not concerned with politics,' he said, 'I am a soldier. My duty is to Russia, whatever the hands that rule her destiny. And if Russia needs me, if Russia can make use of my services, I have no right to deny them.'

It was a statement of a philosophy of simple loyalty to a native land. I myself applaud it. It was an action that shines out as that of an honest man amid the shadows of plots and self-seeking that darkened the affairs of the Russian émigrés.

General Ignatiev left for Moscow. He was there when the Germans were battering at the gates. He is still there, serving his country, obeying any who put the welfare of Russia first. If he did not go with the blessing of my family or of the Grand Duke, I think he went with their envy. Perhaps they were beginning to see that the cause of Russia was something bigger and more lasting than the petty interests of a narrow class. And to those who could guess, however darkly, at the immense forces that were shaking the world, it was welcome as a sign of unity and sanity amid faction and divided counsel that is ever a source of weakness.

Chapter 9

Vindication

Retracing that long journey through the years had done me good. It had made me see things in a better light. I was able to put the Grand Duke in better perspective. I had no right to judge him by what are called in the west sane standards—standards that I had come to adopt as my own. From his point of view it was I who was unreasonable. I was a renegade from the things he and his kind took as normal. The old Russian regarded the miracle as commonplace and looked with suspicion on the rationalism of the west. Father Pyotr had put it quite plainly when he had suggested I was pitting my man-made knowledge against the wisdom of God. One could not expect that these people who had lived all their lives in that atmosphere could change.

The fantastic and incredible had happened to them all their lives. The events of the Revolution, for all their bizarreness, had been unusual only in that they had broken the long reign of power of the aristocracy and the Church. The history of the White Russian community had since carried on the old tradition. Things quite unthinkable in France or England occurred to them and caused no more than a passing scandal. In Paris, leading Frenchmen, even of refugee or anti-government bodies, did not suddenly disappear without trace. But White Russians did. It was typical. It was an example of how a frame of mind, an attitude, can determine a whole way of life. Almost I believe they deliberately chose the abnormal. Perhaps some day a learned professor will study this curious habit psychologically. For myself I am prepared to consider it was lucky that I was able while I was still young enough to be admitted to the world of facts. I count myself lucky indeed. But the Grand Duke, Father Pyotr and the rest—they counted me unfortunate. I had ceased to be a true Russian. I had signed away my birthright. My adoption of British nationality was not simply something of practical convenience to me. In their eyes it was a complete renunciation of everything they held dear: everything that was sacred. Probably in their hearts they were prepared to despise me as the apostate is always despised.

But I did not care. I was glad I had carved out my own destiny.

I was glad I had been able to break free from the influence of the Father Pyotrs. I was still Russian at heart, in the sense that the country of my birth still exercised a pull on me. I had come to realize that very well during those first months of war. I had been staggered by the Russo-German Pact, but, being a Russian and knowing something of Stalin's realism because I could look at his actions with a more sympathetic eye than the ordinary Western European, I did not take it so tragically as most. I felt myself torn between two loyalties that were very real to me. One to Britain and the cause she had embraced though, as we were beginning to see, so disastrously unprepared for war; the other to Russia. And it hurt me with a force that surprised me that the interests of the two countries were, superficially at any rate, so opposed. It was always possible that Stalin might carry that pact further and actively support Germany, and I trembled to think what the results might be. But I do not think I ever really believed affairs would come to that pass.

When Germany invaded Russia I was appalled at the fresh evidence of Nazi infamy. But also I think I was glad—glad not for the fact that Russia was to endure agony but that the world situation had been crystallized. Personally, my two loyalties had become one. I could face the world now with a clear conscience. I could give my love to my two countries honestly.

The Grand Duke did not take the situation in quite the same way. The White Russians had ceased to believe in Hitler as the saviour of the world from Bolshevism, but they had not abated their distaste for the new rulers of Russia. I had many an argument with them on this point, till at length they began to suspect me of being a communist. They looked forward to a result that would crush Germany and Japan and bring Russia to the verge of disaster. Then, they contended, the poor, deluded Russian people would turn from the oppressors who had led them into misery and cry aloud for the return of the rightful rulers of the land—the Tsar and the Church. It mattered not that there was now no true Romanov left to ascend the throne. The Tsar's seat was immortal, of divine creation, and the proper person would come forward to assume the crown at the right time. The Grand Duke himself was a distant connection of the Romanovs, and once I suspected that he himself would not have been reluctant to pick up the discarded sceptre of the Tsar. As for Father Pyotr, whom I met once or twice at the Grand Duke's, he was loud in his insistence that Russia as she was must fall. It was the Divine Will that the Tsars should rule again. Russia had been

punished for her impiety and lack of faith. The moment was coming when she would turn again to the path of righteousness.

I was conscious of a growing gulf between these people, among whom I had been born, and my present self. I was more in sympathy with the new Russia, the Russia of youth and promise, than with their Russia of caste and privilege. The vast new industries of Russia, the exciting progress of the people, the increasing prosperity, the universal education—these meant nothing to them. They had sprung, so they felt, from the unclean and were therefore unclean in themselves. The people's only real mouthpieces were the Tsar and the Church . . .

It was useless to argue with them. Their views were fossilized. It would not have mattered so much if only the elderly people had been concerned. Whatever happened, they had not long to live. But it pained me that they had so deeply graven the image of their ideas on the younger generation. The Princess Dania was more imperialist than her grandmother. I tried to solace myself with the thought that it was only a passing phase, that with growing experience she would learn to face facts as they were. None the less I often despaired. She had been nurtured in the Russian belief that there is something derogatory to God in facing facts.

I was still worried about Natalia Ivanovna, but I dared not speak of the subject. Time was running on. Soon, I was sure, there would be disastrous consequences of their folly in listening to the Holy Father Pyotr. For the moment, he was the victor. The Grand Duchess looked well. She attended parties and sparkled with all her old charm. Her friends—her Russian friends—were all vastly impressed by the miracle. Father Pyotr had saved her. Not only had he redeemed her from the cruel threat of the operating table; he had given her back her youth. How could anyone, even a prejudiced surgeon, pretend to believe otherwise?

It was towards the end of 1941 that the summons came. I had been late at the hospital and had returned to my consulting-rooms before going home. The telephone rang and I picked it up with a gesture of annoyance. My expression changed as I listened. It was the Grand Duke. He was agitated . . . fear was in his voice.

'Come quickly, George. It is urgent. At once. Natalia Ivanovna has collapsed. She was here with friends . . . they were laughing and talking . . . someone put on a Tschaikovsky valse and she danced, saying she had danced to that valse with the Tsar himself. And then . . . and then . . .'

'Yes?'

'She . . . she collapsed. We have put her on a divan, but she looks as though she is dead already.'

'I'll come at once.'

My car was outside. As I sped through the blacked-out streets I thought of all the things I might have said. I might have asked how it was that Father Pyotr was helpless. Had divine inspiration suddenly dried up? Had he sinned and lost contact with the Infinite? But I had said none of these things. I was afraid for Natalia Ivanovna. It did not give me any satisfaction that, on the face of it, my prognosis was being proved. Of course, it might be something else. . . . But I had prepared for the worst. In my bag were the special drops.

One glance at the Duchess was sufficient to show the seriousness of her condition. Slowly I administered the drops and she revived a little, sufficiently to be able to speak and answer questions. Even then she became herself and apologized weakly for causing so much trouble.

Father Pyotr stood by, watching me with lowered brows. Every movement I made was followed closely by his keen eyes. At last he stepped forward.

'I am sure the attack will pass,' he said. 'It is only temporary.'

'I am afraid, Holy Father,' I replied, unable to resist the opportunity, 'I am in charge now. The case is urgent, and I have no time to waste in words.'

He bowed slightly and stood aside.

Before I had left my rooms I had telephoned for a nurse. She had now arrived and I left her in charge. For the moment nothing more could be done. I found the Grand Duke, Pyotr, and Dania in an adjoining room. Ivan Pavlovitch was looking grave, and raised his eyebrows at me as I entered.

'How is she, George?' he asked eagerly. 'Can I go to her? Will she . . . recover?'

'She must have absolute rest and quiet for the time being, and she is in good hands. Later I'll go back to her and then I can give you a full report.'

There was a short silence. The Grand Duke was looking worried and kept glancing from me to Pyotr as though he was seeking courage to say something that would not be well received by one of us. At last he cleared his throat and spoke, carefully avoiding our eyes.

'Tell me, Holy Father,' he said to Pyotr, 'what is your opinion? Is this serious?' He paused and continued before Pyotr could reply. 'I have never known her have an attack like this. I am worried . . . desperately anxious . . .'

'Have you lost faith?' Pyotr's arms were folded on his breast. Ivan Pavlovitch's question had restored his confidence. Ah, I thought, so it is going to be a fight again; you are not going to relinquish her so easily.

'It is not a matter of faith,' said the Grand Duke awkwardly. 'I know her so well. She is always very strong and brave. Her first care always is to cause no trouble. The pain must be terrible if she can fight it no longer.'

'The attacks are always painful,' replied Pyotr, rather airily. 'But I have proved them to be harmless.'

Dania looked up. The light of admiration no longer burned in her eyes.

'Mr. Sava did not agree with you.'

'No,' the Grand Duke nodded. 'He said all along that you . . . we . . . all of us were wrong. It is very worrying.'

'You are upset,' said Pyotr, refolding his hands. 'It is only natural, and I forgive you for your passing show of doubt. If it will reassure you, I will repeat the test and . . .'

'What difference will that make?' demanded Dania. 'She is really ill. If you get the same result it tells us nothing.'

'She may have developed some other trouble during the past few months,' returned Pyotr calmly.

I took no part in this conversation. Pyotr was in difficult waters and I was not going to help him. If he was allowed to use his dart again, no doubt he would diagnose something different so as to make himself safe and impress everyone with his honesty. He was manoeuvring hard for a change of ground. I could see by the slight twitching of his long, sensitive fingers that he was on edge.

The Grand Duke made no immediate comment on the proposal.

'But tell me, Holy Father, I implore you,' he begged. 'Are you quite sure you were right? Is it possible for you to have made a mistake?'

'God makes no mistakes.'

Dania's lips curled. 'But God doesn't play darts either,' she said, adding hastily: 'Sorry, Holy Father.'

Pyotr's face remained immobile, but his fingers writhed slightly. 'It is only human to find it difficult to follow the ways of God,' he said sententiously. 'We, in our ignorance, can never see the end of them or guess where they will lead us. Yet we must travel the path that He points out, for unless we do we shall never find peace or happiness either in earth or in heaven.'

'But that is not convincing, Holy Father. Excuse me, but I am

distraught. It will not be easy to convince Mr. Sava this time. Natalia Ivanovna is very ill. We've got to admit that. Mr. Sava is a doctor and will accept responsibility for the case if I ask him—but only on his own terms. We must leave it to Natalia Ivanovna when she is strong enough to decide. If she still has faith I shall be content. I am sorry to have to be blunt, Holy Father. Forgive me.'

'You are not the first who has wavered at the first test of faith,' remarked Pyotr.

I decided it was time to intervene. The Grand Duke had cast several appealing glances at me, but I had ignored them. It was better that all of them should reveal their thoughts before I made any move.

'For the time being at any rate,' I said, 'I am in charge of the case, and I forbid any and every interference with the patient. Above all, I forbid any sort of reference to Father Pyotr's miracles. In a little while, Ivan Pavlovitch, you may go in and see Natalia Ivanovna, but I put you on your honour to say nothing of this business of the arrow. She must be kept quiet—absolutely. She must not be worried.'

'Very well, George,' said the Grand Duke, with unusual humility. 'What . . . what do you think of her condition?'

He had read my doubts in my face. My directness must have impressed him. Never before had I known His Imperial Highness so ready to listen.

'I find it difficult to say,' I returned.

'Difficult? But surely . . . surely you know?'

'Yes. The difficulty has nothing to do with the medical aspect of the case. I always find it difficult to be forced into the position of saying, "I told you so".'

Dania half started forward, her eyes wide and horror-stricken. Father Pyotr's hands closed more firmly the one on the other. The Grand Duke gave me an appealing glance.

'You mean . . .?'

'You want the truth?' I asked.

He nodded. 'Of course. At any rate be merciful to me to that extent.'

'Well then, the malignant growth I recognized when I was allowed to examine her has now spread. It is affecting several vital organs. Natalia Ivanovna is dangerously ill—very dangerously.'

He did not reply at once. He seemed dumbfounded and kept tugging at the lapel of his coat. I have rarely seen a man so completely crushed. He did throw a single glance in the direction of Pyotr, who stood so erect and calm, that he might have been a statue.

'Has . . . has she got a chance?' asked the Grand Duke at last. His voice was barely above a whisper but it seemed to penetrate everywhere. Dania's lips moved silently. It looked as though she was repeating the question.

I steeled myself for what I had to say. It is the most difficult thing a doctor ever has to say, and he says it only when he feels that every resource has been exhausted. But I could not temporize with platitudes. These were my friends, for all they had served me a shabby trick. I owed it to them to tell the truth. Besides, the Grand Duke had asked me to tell the truth and had meant it. He had not added the mental rider so many do when asking a doctor to 'let them know the worst.' They make a reservation. 'Tell me the truth', they say, 'provided it is good and hopeful.'

The Grand Duke passed his hand across his brow. He looked old and worn. Hard, cordlike veins stood out on the back of that hand —an old man's hand. I thought he was going to take me by the coat and plead with me, but he spared me that embarrassment.

'But George . . . she is alive? Tell me that, please. She is still alive?'

I nodded. 'She may live for a little while yet. She almost certainly will.'

'Thank God for that! I do not understand.' Once again the worn hand passed across his troubled brow. 'Until only an hour or so ago she was gay, bubbling over with her old spirits, better than I have seen her for a long time. She had no pain. And then . . .'

'I know,' I said softly, in spite of myself putting my arm round his shoulder. I cursed Pyotr. I cursed myself. He was a rogue, and I had been a weak fool. I should have fought him tooth and nail. Perhaps in the last account this would be placed to my debit equally with his. I could have spared this triumph. Gladly would I have acknowledged myself wrong before Pyotr. But it could not be. Natalia Ivanovna's days were numbered. The last tide was already turned and was running out.

'It is often like that,' I went on gently. 'Have you ever seen a dying fire throw up a shower of lovely sparks and then go black? It is like that in these cases.'

'You must help her, George, you must.' He spoke dully.

'The most I can do is to make things easier for her, Ivan Pavlovitch.'

He looked at me unbelievingly. So, I thought, he is no better than the rest. He demands the truth, cold, stark truth, and then proceeds to try to make you prove yourself a liar.

'You must save her,' he said thickly.

'Five months ago I could have saved her. But that time has passed. The opportunity was lost.'

'But surely you could operate now? Surely something could be done?'

'I could operate—yes. But let us look at the possibilities. The cost of that operation might be the few precious weeks or days she still has before her. At best, if all went well—better than I could hope—it might not gain for her more than a few months.'

'God will help you, my son.' It was Pyotr. His deep voice reverberated round the room. A little earlier, in the anxiety of the moment, I had been prepared to forgive him, to forgo my horrible vindication. But this intervention roused all my animosity. Even now, when he had been proved a charlatan who gambled in innocent lives, he was trying to teach me my job.

'It is too late,' I said firmly, and tried to turn away. But he caught me by the sleeve and turned the full force of his glowing eyes upon me.

'It is never too late,' he said intensely. 'Natalia Ivanovna's illness must have changed since . . . since I determined what it was. God has taken it out of my hands. He calls on you to carry out His will.'

'Does He need the help of medicine?'

'You are bitter, my son,' said Pyotr evenly. 'I can understand it. I forgive you for the blasphemy for I know you do not mean to traduce the Most High. Natalia Ivanovna is dear to you. She is dear to us all. If you can help her, do not hesitate. God will bless your work.'

'He should have blessed it five months ago and opened the eyes of Ivan Pavlovitch to the truth,' I said.

'He gave His message then,' retorted Pyotr unmoved. 'Your help was not needed.'

I turned away. It was going to develop into the old wrangle. 'It is futile to go back on all that. Everything seems futile. An operation might be too much for her.'

The Grand Duke braced himself. 'I find it difficult to understand you, George,' he said with a return to his normal dignity. 'You practically admit that an operation is her only chance, yet you refuse to undertake it.'

'You put it too strongly, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I answered. 'Let us get this quite clear. An operation is just possible, but you must not think it a chance of life. At best it could not give her more than——' I hesitated, not wanting to burden him more with care yet anxious that he should see things as they were—'more than a period of grace. Perhaps it might be a few months, instead of a few weeks.'

'But she would live, and every minute is precious.'

'She *might*. That is why I say it is wrong to regard an operation as even an outside chance. More than that . . . she would suffer, suffer terribly.'

'Yet otherwise she would be sure to . . . to . . .' His voice faded out. He was the shattered old man again, and my sympathy was aroused once more.

'Yes, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I replied quietly.

'Then you are wrong, George. It *is* a chance. It would be a reprieve at least. And beyond that there is always hope. I cannot imagine my dear Natalia Ivanovna going like that . . . she who has always been so bright and gay. If I have ever thought of the end, the inevitable end, I suppose I have imagined it like the beautiful end of a summer's day, fading out in a riot of lovely tints, gracious even to the last.'

'Have faith,' boomed Pyotr suddenly. 'Have faith, Ivan Pavlovitch. Where there is faith there is also the hope that comes from knowledge of divine help.'

I ignored him. 'It is hard, terribly hard. Perhaps it is harder for me than you think. Here am I, a surgeon, a doctor, and I feel powerless to save one whom I have known from childhood, who has been a second mother to me, and who is one of my most cherished friends. But don't forget the alternative. It might be a reprieve, as you say; but also, and not less surely, it might also mean the loss of the last slender hope there is. We might hasten instead of delay that grim ending.'

'To think of her like that!' muttered the Grand Duke. 'She to whom age seemed nothing, condemned to that in two weeks. I think I see what you mean, George. They would be terrible, heart-breaking weeks, but she would still be with us. We should still hear her beloved voice, see her dear face, feel the caress of her hand. I know her, George; no one knows her better. If she must go then I am sure she would rather go fighting, resisting to the end, taking the last chance with open eyes and that brave smile on her lips that I have seen so often and has filled me again with the courage that I had lost. When the Bolsheviks swept us out of the land it was the end for me. In my pocket I had a revolver. There was a bullet in it for me . . . and one for her. Yes, it was like that. But her smile saved us. She laughed at fate and the threat of poverty. "Life is good," she said. "Let us enjoy it while we may." And I am sure that is what she would say now. She would cling to life, whatever the price.'

I stood for a moment in thought. I wanted to humour him,

to see the case as he wanted to see it, to imagine that I had the power to give her the chance. But I knew I must not delude myself or the Grand Duke. I had been weak and dishonest with myself before. I must not repeat that performance. With an effort I made up my mind—or rather, I swept aside his objections and came back to my original decision.

'I am sorry, Ivan Pavlovitch. Faith and hope are great virtues, but there are times when facts are so hard and cruel that they must bow before the truth. I cannot operate.'

For a moment there was a silence. Then Ivan Pavlovitch's mood changed. He turned on me savagely.

'Is this your revenge?' he thundered. 'Can it be that you wish to punish me for not taking your advice before, for listening to the words of this holy man? I would give my own life to save Natalia Ivanovna if that were possible. If you want revenge do what you will with me, but do not deny your sacred duty as a doctor in the cause of a cheap triumph for your pride.'

'I want no revenge. I stand in need of punishment more than you. This case will haunt me to the grave. But I have to abide by my opinion. You are at liberty to call in anyone you choose. But I am sure that any honest opinion will be the same as mine.'

'I will make this last appeal, George. Think it over. Think of what it means to all of us and to yourself. Ask yourself again whether the risk is not worth the taking in the light of what I have told you of her attitude to life.'

'I can do that. But I am certain my opinion will remain unaltered.'

Pyotr stepped forward. His cocksureness was gone, and I might at another time have been amused by the fact. But I was in no mood for revenge or triumphs. He stood before me like a suppliant.

'Can't you see how Ivan Pavlovitch suffers?' he began.

'My first and only concern is with Natalia Ivanovna.'

'God will guide your hand,' he went on. 'Operate in the name of His holy compassion.'

'God is my conscience. I cannot operate. I cannot gamble with the little time that is left to her.'

'But we plead with you.' He bowed his head in a humility I felt to be almost genuine. 'If Ivan Pavlovitch is ready to take the chance, because it is the one chance left, will you not do as he asks?'

'I cannot, I tell you,' I returned impatiently. I was becoming distracted. 'It is too late. The chance of failure, of cutting her life shorter than it need be, even now, is greater than the chance of prolonging it.'

'Nothing will make you change your mind?'

'I will not say "nothing", because that is not the attitude of science. I can only abide by my opinion, honestly formed. I am sorry.'

Pyotr turned away wearily. The Grand Duke looked at me.

'Can I go to see her now?' he asked abjectly.

'Yes,' I said. 'But stay only a few minutes. Do not excite her. Above all, do not ask her to make decisions,' I added meaningly.

'Thank you, George. You can trust me.'

No sooner had he gone than Pyotr returned to the attack. I felt like repeating the words of the English Henry II: 'Will no-one rid me of this turbulent priest?' But I was too troubled even to protest and ask for peace.

'Let me plead with you, my son,' he said quietly. I was surprised to notice that his manner was now quite free of all theatricality. 'It is not good to harden the heart. Listen with your heart, my son, listen with your love, and do not let Ivan Pavlovitch ask of you in vain.'

'I know what you want to say and I appreciate your motives, Father Pyotr,' I returned. 'But it is too late for words. Natalia Ivanovna is beyond the help of man.'

'Of man alone, my son. That may be true. But surely not of man directed by the hand of God. He will be with you in this trial. He will guide your counsel if you will ask of Him humbly, and give strength and skill to your hand. Besides, you must realize what you are doing. You will have to defend yourself for your inactivity. Are you as sure of yourself as that?'

Of course I was, the old fool! If I had already turned grey with the worry of this business I should not have been surprised. And all this pleading, this mixing of God and science, the finite with the infinite, was not helping me, but dragging all sorts of red herrings across the trail. I was thinking of some suitable reply—something that would not offend him yet would indicate that further talk of this kind was useless, when Princess Dania interrupted.

She had been watching and listening closely. I could see her nerves were overwrought and thought I might well have another case on my hands unless she took control of herself. Now she was calm. She spoke with an abrupt decisiveness that reminded me of her grandfather, the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch.

'Leave us alone, Holy Father,' she said sharply. 'I wish to talk with Mr. Sava privately.'

He looked at her in some surprise and then bowed slightly.

'As you wish, my daughter,' he said. And left the room.

Chapter 10

Princess Dania

The Princess Dania looked at me, but for a minute or two she did not speak. I sighed wearily. I thought I knew precisely what was coming. There were to be more appeals. There were to be more hints that I was seeking a cheap and tawdry revenge for the Pyotr affair. The Grand Duke had tried the approach of the heart-broken husband. Father Pyotr had brought the appeals to the level of religion and ethics, with a drop of mysticism added. What would be Dania's approach? She was young. She was beautiful. She had been brought up in Paris and New York. No doubt she had learnt in the latter city the meaning of the phrase 'knowing all the answers'. Her knowledge of them was perhaps to be exploited against me.

I had to fight desperately hard with myself to keep the whole business in proper perspective. All these arguments, all these appeals were causing me at times to lose sight of the fact that I had a patient desperately ill in my charge. I was in danger at moments of forgetting the purely medical aspects of the case and my reasons for the adoption of my present position. Then everything tended to become a battle of wills, with numbers against me. I had to persuade myself that I really was in earnest and that I was also open to reasonable argument if any rational grounds could be advanced for showing me to be wrong. No doubt all this was very wrong, but I think any man in my position would have gone through the same emotional states.

Dania lit a cigarette and exhaled the smoke in a long, sinuous column. She settled herself in a chair, crossed her legs, and looked at me. Then she began. I thought I was prepared for anything, but what actually happened was quite unexpected.

'We don't know each other very well yet, George,' she said. 'But you are an old friend of the family, and I am going to treat you as such. Why this obstinacy?'

Ha! I thought, the direct attack, the attempt to bring me to my knees and confess I was a headstrong fool.

'I am not being obstinate,' I replied. 'When the Grand Duchess first came to me I spent a lot of time analysing her case. I gave it every minute of my attention and went to a great deal of trouble

to make sure that my diagnosis was right. That was why I was so outraged when Pyotr was drawn into it with his miracle-working. To-night I have had proof of my correctness—the proof I never wished to see . . . that no doctor ever wants to see. There is nothing more humiliating in medicine than making a fatal prognosis and knowing that one is inexorably right.'

'I see. But I still think you are being a little obtuse. Forgive me . . . I said I was going to speak to you as an old family friend.'

'I am honoured.'

She smiled very slightly, and I wondered if I had protested too much, like a man trying at all costs to prove himself right even against his better judgement.

'Frankly, I do not believe you, George. You are contradicting yourself just a little. You have said yourself that my grandmother may lose all if you operate . . . and also that she might make a small gain. Now I'm not going to dispute your . . . what d'you call it?—prognosis.' She made a wry face. 'You have proved yourself, most unfortunately, right. But can't you see that even a small gain—months instead of weeks, as you put it—would be a considerable comfort to her and all of us in the circumstances? By what right do you claim to withhold that gain from her and us? Ask yourself that question, please.'

She looked at me; her eyes large and appealing. But she was not trying the 'sobstuff' appeal. She was genuinely concerned, trying to argue me round by reason to her point of view.

'It is not in my power to grant that gain,' I said.

'You can agree to operate.'

'True. But that would be neither wise nor kind when the operation has everything against it—when it is most unlikely to be successful.'

'Are you really so defeatist?' She grew very serious. 'I don't think so. You could not have got where you are to-day if you had not been prepared to take risks. Didn't I once hear someone say of you that your speciality was operating successfully when all other surgeons had turned a case down?'

'I never fear risk when I consider the risk worthwhile. In this case I do not think it is.'

'That is surely for Natalia Ivanovna and ourselves to decide, isn't it? Forgive me if I am treading clumsily on the risky ground of medical etiquette, but I think I am right.'

'To a certain degree. I also am right if I refuse to operate. You might find another surgeon who would.'

'Listen, George,' she said suddenly after a pause. 'I think I know what you think of me—the opinion you have formed of me. You imagine me as a sort of fairy-tale princess who has spent twenty-one years wrapped up in the finest cotton wool money can buy . . . just the sort of Russian princess in a Hollywood film. You believe that one breath of reality would blow me away. You think I have lived all my life amid cocktail parties and smart occasions, and have come to consider that these things make up the whole of life. Well, you may be right to a certain extent. But I'm not quite so ignorant as you seem to believe. In some ways I think I know more about life than you do, and particularly of what is involved in this fight for my grandmother's life. No, don't interrupt, George, I want to tell you something.'

She looked so earnest, so unexpectedly a woman of the world, that I checked the interjection I was about to make.

'Just let me tell you a little of what I think of you. I admire you as a surgeon, and I believe you give your opinions honestly and without fear. But aren't you a prisoner of your own life, just as you imagine me to be? Don't you like to think that everything can be neatly solved by the rules of science and so on, and believe that you can weigh up chances with mathematical exactitude? I think so—just a little bit.'

'I like to think I never express an opinion on a case except on the soundest grounds.'

'Precisely. But really you know that it is all a matter of weighing risk against risk. Now listen . . . Grandfather, grandmother, myself, all of us are concerned with a chance, a bare chance. All that matters to us is that there is a chance, our particular pet chance. We know it's slender—less than that perhaps. There may be as little hope as you say there is. But that chance is ours. It is all we have, and we must stick to it at all costs. We alone can use it for success; and we alone must suffer for it if it fails. But it is ours . . . oh, I must keep saying that, it is so important! And we must not be allowed to have it taken away from us untried and unused. Whatever serves life has the divine blessing. You may not agree with the Holy Father on most things, but surely you cannot deny that.'

'But, Princess . . .'

'No, don't interrupt. I've so much to say, and Grandfather may be back at any moment. I want to tell you a story—my story—the story of a chance I had to take. It will explain why I believe in taking chances, however hopeless they may appear to be. In May, 1940,' she went on, 'I was in Paris. I was staying at the Ritz—oh, don't

smile in that way as if to say "Where else could this expensive creature stay but at the Ritz!" You are right. If I can afford the best, I have it, and there I had one of the best suites. To-day, I believe, a German general occupies the very rooms I had. You may draw a moral from that if you like.'

I said nothing. I did not know what to do, for she was very intent and extremely serious.

'One morning, an old friend of my father's, Fedor Gregorivitch Dashnikoff, rushed into my bedroom without so much as knocking, shook me by the shoulder, and told me the Germans were coming. In a few hours they might be in Paris itself. I was very tired that morning . . . we had played poker the night before, and I had a hangover. But for all that I dressed in five minutes. I had never dressed so fast in my life before. I rang for my maid, but there was no reply. She had waited for nothing—except, I believe, to pack some of my things to take with her. But I packed what I could. In the hotel safe were my jewels. Some of them you may have seen in the old days in Russia when my grandmother wore them. It broke my heart to part with them but I had no time to look for the manager and have them taken out and go through all the formalities of signing a receipt. I could see that I had a chance, a very slender chance, a million to one chance, if you like, to make my escape, and I was determined to take it, no matter what the loss to me.'

'This is news to me,' I said, feeling that some remark was necessary. 'I did not know you were in Paris then.'

She did not appear to have heard me. She went on with her story as though I had not interrupted.

'It was a terrible experience. Have you ever turned over an ants' nest and watched the poor creatures pouring out, trying to save the only things that matter to them—their eggs and their cocoons? That is what it was like. Refugees were streaming out of the city in all directions, all carrying with them what they could—just like ants carrying loads several times bigger than themselves. Some were walking. Others had managed to seize vehicles of some kind or another. There were men in evening dress riding in donkey-barrows, and soldiers carrying bundles like old peasant women. But you know all about it, of course. The dreary story has been told over and over again. Refugee stories are nowadays like fishing stories, aren't they?'

She grew suddenly bitter. Her smile was hard and cynical. 'I have told a few people of that experience of mine', she said, 'and I've been able to listen to the comments of the uncomfortable people

who go from one drawing-room to another in New York or London and grumble because they can't get this or that on account of the war.' Her lips curled. 'People are bored with refugees. I don't blame them. All their stories are the same, and what does it matter if a thousand helpless civilians have been machine-gunned or a thousand-and-one? It only matters to that odd one, the extra one whose slender chance of life might go at any moment—by a Nazi bullet. Well, I was fortunate. Some people lost everything, and were unfortunate enough not to lose their lives before they realized escape was impossible. I lost only one thing—my mink coat. Still, it wasn't new, and I managed to get another on my arrival in New York.'

'How did you get there?' I asked. I dared not dismiss her story. She was terribly keen to tell it. But I did not see what it had to do with Natalia Ivanovna. Indeed, I found my attention wandering from time to time. What was happening in that room? I almost wished to see the door open and hear the voice of the nurse summoning me.

'You are being very patient and polite, George,' she resumed. 'I can feel you're thinking me an intolerable bore and exhibitionist, choosing this moment to tell this story. But it has a point, as you'll see.

'People kept telling me it was impossible to get away—quite impossible. But I was determined to try. I managed to reach the coast and a little port that seemed to have all the little ships of the world crowded into it. And on every little ship were crowds and crowds of refugees, so that it looked as if there wasn't room even for a single mouse. I was dead tired but went to a little quayside café, chock-full with sailors. I ordered absinthe, because it was the first thing that caught my eye. I had never drunk it before. I had five and felt horribly drunk. Then I had five more and drank myself sober. I was wearing my mink coat and it was attracting attention. Perhaps I was attracting attention, too.'

She sighed and smiled a little. But her eyes were still serious, and I felt that, at any rate, she was relieving her nervous tension by this story. It was doing her good, and it would be better for me if I had one calm person to deal with at the end.

'One of the sailors came up to me and made some remark. I ordered another absinthe because I knew I had to keep sober. He had taken a fancy to me, it seems, and had ranked me on a more professional footing than I had the right to claim. I told him why I was there. He shook his head. "No room," he said. "If they put another person on any of them ships, it'll sink. I don't suppose half of them will get anywhere as it is." Then he started looking me up

and down. I have seen men at cattle shows look at prize cows and bulls just like that. I was quite prepared for what he said next.

'"There might be a way," he said slowly. "It'll cost you something, though." I nodded and pulled my bag on to the table. "How much?" I asked. I had several thousand francs on me. He looked at the notes and shook his head. "That's worth nothing. You don't have to be rich to pay my price." I nodded understandingly. "All right," I said, and ordered him and myself another drink to seal the bargain. I could see the alternatives quite plainly. It was either the sailor or the Nazis behind me. The sailor was coarse, dirty, and animal; but I had seen and heard quite enough of what the Nazis could do and did do. I preferred the sailor. I told him so and why. He took it quite calmly. Perhaps he had expected it to be like that.'

'This is horrible, Dania!' I exclaimed, moved to sympathy and interest at last. 'And . . .?'

'Everything is horrible from one point of view. But nothing looks horrible when it gives you a chance. I was offered a chance, a chance to get away to America and friends and my own life; and if the road there was covered with muck, I should only be a fool if I objected to getting my shoes dirty.'

She was so amazingly calm that I staggered, as she went on: 'He put me in a small rowing boat and took me to a larger ship that was lying-to in the offing. He stowed me away in some sort of cubby-hole. Then he thoughtfully took my mink coat and said he would come back later. He had some more business to transact before the ship sailed.

'I could see that he meant to keep his promise. He had done what he had contracted to do and he was not the sort to forgo his just price. I suppose I could have rushed away and hidden in some other corner of the ship or thrown myself on the mercy of the captain. But I was determined not to cheat him. He had done his part and I had to do mine. A princess of Russia does not cheat or go back on her word,' she said proudly.

She paused and slowly lit another cigarette. I waited. Perhaps she was plucking up courage to tell the last part. It would have been impertinent to press her.

'I waited patiently. I listened as the ship went through all the business of putting to sea. But still the sailor did not come. At last I was discovered and brought before the captain. He merely shrugged and muttered something about what did one more matter, and ordered me to be put to work along with the other refugees.

'Every day I searched among the sailors of the crew, but I never saw my rescuer. I suppose he went ashore, pawned his security—the mink coat—and got so drunk he failed to return to his ship. So he's still got my I.O.U. as it were. The work was terribly hard, but I quite enjoyed it,' she went on inconsequently, 'though it ruined my hands, and I had to have a manicure every day when I got to New York.'

She looked at me without speaking and then leant forward.

'George, can't you see the moral? Never let a chance go by however stiff the price may seem to be. Now, please, give Natalia Ivanovna her chance. She will honour her debt if necessary like a Russian princess, but she will not grumble if the price, by good fortune, is not demanded.'

What was I to make of it? Was I to believe this story with its trick ending--a trick ending that had more of the marks of art than the imprimatur of truth? And what bearing had it on the case of the Grand Duchess? I began to suspect it had been designed to confuse me, to weaken my resolution by exciting sympathy.

'I am sorry to hear all this,' I said. 'But it does not affect the position. The chance you took has nothing to do with the chances of this operation. There is no chance, Dania. There is only an illusion of one.'

She went white with anger and rose from her seat. But she kept herself in admirable control.

'Mr. Sava,' she said, 'you have been consulted by the Grand Duke. I am speaking on his behalf. He will support what I say. I order you to operate.'

'You cannot do that,' I returned, accepting the challenge.

'I can and do. If you refuse, the world will know you for what you seem to be—a coward; a man so wrapped up in his own success that he dare not risk a failure, a surgeon not prepared to take a chance even to save a valued life.'

I felt myself growing hot. My hands became moist. I was standing facing her and she could see my rising anger. It was her anger against mine.

'I am sorry,' I said, as calmly as I could. 'There is nothing I can do about it.'

'You're so proud of yourself, aren't you?' she flashed. 'You are so smug in the correctness of your medical behaviour, so sure that the little men who follow convention instead of thinking, will support you. What a triumph it must be for you. How you will be

able to chuckle over the way you got your own back on those credulous Russians! You're not a man, George Sava. You have become a husk. You cannot face facts any longer, and you defy them from the ramparts of Harley Street, feeling the strength that even a craven feels among a couple of others like him . . .'

She broke off suddenly and her eyes opened wide. Then she darted towards the door. I spun round quickly and it was my turn to be amazed. Through the door came the Grand Duchess. On one side of her was the nurse, and on the other the Grand Duke.

The nurse looked at me with a half-frightened, half-anxious air.

'She insisted, sir . . .' she began.

'I am glad to see she has recovered so well,' I said quickly. This incredible case was getting beyond me. I was resigned to anything. It was better to let the drama play itself out. The end, I felt, with a fatalism that is usually foreign to me, was ordained. I was puppet dancing to a string pulled by an unseen fate whose sense of humour I deplored.

Instinctively I felt there was going to be another battle. And when Father Pyotr came in and stood with folded arms just behind the Grand Duchess and a little to her left, I knew that the contestants were coming up for the final round. I could almost hear the echo of the bell calling the seconds out of the ring.

Natalia Ivanovna smiled weakly as the nurse made her comfortable in a chair.

'George,' she said suddenly, without any warning, 'there is not much time . . . I can feel it in my bones, and when my bones tell me things they never lie. I'm not too strong. No, I'm not weak—just not too strong. Now, look at me, George . . . look me straight in the eye, and tell me truthfully. How bad is it? I know it is bad because Ivan Pavlovitch will tell me nothing. The question is—how bad?'

I was moved by her courage. I could not evade the question.

'Very bad,' I replied. At the same time I thought: so I shall have to go through it all over again.

'Any chance?' she demanded tersely, as though speaking not of her own fate but of some matter under discussion.

I hesitated. But she would have no equivocation.

'The truth, George,' she urged quickly. 'Any chance?'

'None,' I said, my voice little more than a whisper.

'Ah! I told you my bones never lied. But Dania, what's the matter. What's all this about?'

Dania had gone into uncontrollable sobs. She flung herself tearfully beside her grandmother.

'He could operate,' she cried. 'But he refuses to do so.'

The Grand Duchess smoothed Dania's hair with her hand and looked at me. She had a very birdlike expression of inquisitiveness. 'How is that, George?' she asked. 'What are your reasons?'

'Because . . . well . . . because it may cost you your life.'

She smiled calmly and sat back in the chair, still stroking Dania's head.

'This life. A life of sadness and tears all round me—even now.' She looked down at Dania. 'I admire your scruples, George, but I'm not interested in preserving sorrow and a passing shadow. Life's a fraud, you know. We old people always tell you youngsters that, but none of you believe it, thank God, till you're old enough to find it out for yourselves. Now, be good to me, George. Operate. Save me from tears and a bath-chair or a water-bed. Give me the real thing.'

I was silent. She had not pleaded with me. She had not tried to move me to compassion. She had taken it for granted that I would help her to make the best of a bad job. She had made me a partner in an adventure of which the upshot did not really matter. I weakened. What did it matter? A few days or a few weeks—or a few hours. Death like this, stalking her all the time, waiting for the moment to trip her up, or death as she would wish it—taking a chance, laughing at fate. My reasons for refusal were good ones. Her reasons for urging me to speculate were equally good.

I looked straight at her and caught an unexpected twinkle in her eye. Wasn't that, I asked myself, more worth fighting for than all the correct conduct in the world? I made my resolution. I swept aside all my previous objections. And I felt happy. I was like a man who has stood shivering on the edge of the sea, too timid to take the plunge and who, having been dragged in by a friend, finds the water warm and invigorating. What a fool I had been!

'I will operate,' I said slowly. 'To-morrow morning.'

'Bless you, George,' she said simply. 'May I go home?'

'No, you must stay here.'

It was late. There were preparations to be made. I tore myself away and took the nurse aside. The directions I gave her were explicit and elaborate. But none of them was necessary. The Grand Duchess, I was informed when I telephoned very early next morning, had spent a good night. She was looking forward to the operation. . . .

I hung up the receiver and laughed. I could not help it. I thought of her smile, the twinkle in her eye, her quiet, semi-humorous courage. How much better they were than all the pomposity in the world!

Chapter 11

The End of a Case

I did not feel so happy when I came to consider what I had undertaken to do. Natalia Ivanovna was not a young woman; she was not even middle-aged. And the operation I had to perform was a pretty extensive one. There was the question of an anaesthetic. Her condition was not good; I dared not risk a general one. In this case I should have to use, as I had often done before, a special form of local anaesthesia. First the patient is put into a state of twilight sleep by an injection and at the time of the operation an injection is made into the site of the operation. It is a good method. The patient is spared the anxiety of knowing when he is going to be taken to the theatre. There is a minimum strain on the heart and the respiratory system. And one need not hurry unduly, as one has to sometimes when the patient is elderly and weak and has been given a general anaesthetic.

All the same, I entered the theatre feeling rather anxious and depressed. At first, however, all went well. She seemed to be taking it better than I had any right to expect. But a little later there was one very bad moment. I could not feel her pulse. Everything was ready for such an emergency, but I was hoping these precautions would not have to be used. My assistant rapidly gave artificial respiration and the pulse came to life again—a struggling, flickering thing, like a flame trying to take hold on damp wood.

At last it was over. I ordered a blood transfusion—a pint of preserved blood from the store at once, and ten minutes after the operation she was injected with morphine. Patients come to quickly after this method of anaesthesia but they are frequently—as the Grand Duchess was—in great pain, and morphine, that great gift to medicine, is often useful. I left her in charge of a nurse on whom I could rely utterly, and left one of my best assistants with her with instructions not to leave her until I gave permission.

During an operation one is concerned only with the work in hand. One's mind must be cleared of all extraneous thoughts, and there is no room for ands and ifs. But afterwards one feels the strain. So much depends upon the patient. His will to live, the

hidden secrets of his constitution which sometimes elude even the most searching examination: these are unknown factors that make all the difference between success and failure.

I went back to my room in the hospital. I had hoped it would be empty so that I might have time to prepare myself. But it was not. The Grand Duke and Dania had swept aside all restrictions: they were waiting for me. And with them was the man I least wanted to see—Father Pyotr. The crucifix sparkled on his ebon robes. The white hands folded themselves in mock humility beneath it. It was because of him and his glib tongue that I had been forced to do what I had done, to make a show of fight from a hopeless position when I might have carried it through with all in my favour.

'Sit down, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I said. He was standing, and I could see he was under great strain. 'And you, too, Father Pyotr.' It occurred to me with the irrelevance that so often marks serious occasions that I had never yet seen him seated. That straight back might be held by an iron rod, like that which old-fashioned photographers used to keep sitters in position before the days of wide-aperture lenses, fast plates, and good artificial lighting.

'It was Ivan Pavlovitch's wish that I should pray with him for a while,' said Pyotr. 'If you will excuse me, I will remain standing.'

'As you wish,' I replied shortly. 'Well, the operation is over. We have done what we could . . . in the circumstances. All that remains is hope.'

Dania turned bright eyes upon me. 'It is successful? I knew you'd do it. I knew you'd work a miracle.'

'Miracles are not in my line,' I replied tersely. 'I repeat, there is nothing to do but hope.'

'Hope?' The Grand Duke echoed the word as though not understanding me.

'Yes.' I was grim. I knew it. But I could not help it. 'Hope without certainty . . . but hope is always uncertain. If we were certain there would be no need to hope. I have no wish to enter into recriminations, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I went on, 'but as a doctor I must remind you that it is now more than five months ago since I told you an operation was imperative. Natalia Ivanovna came through it as well as could be expected, but the dice are heavily cogged against her. We have done all we can . . . spared her full anaesthesia and given her a blood transfusion. That is why I say there is now nothing but hope.'

'And you yourself have little hope?' He asked the question wearily, but with the air of a man who wants to be proved wrong. Unfortunately I could not oblige him.

'There is only a desperate chance, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I said, as kindly as I could.

'There is no need to mince words with us,' broke in Dania.

For some reason she infuriated me. It was she who had argued against my original decision, she who had told me how important it was never to neglect chances, and now she was telling me not to entertain the slightest hope, to abandon even the right to feel I had done something, however small.

'I am not mincing words for your sake, princess,' I said. 'If I seem to, it is to save myself. I am trying to forget the suffering you—all of you—have brought on Natalia Ivanovna. She is very dear to me, the symbol of all that was best in the Russia I, like you, have lost. I do not mourn the rest of what I have lost, but I should grieve for her. And I was forced to look on helplessly, silently, while all she stood for to me was destroyed . . . yes, destroyed by madness, ignorance, and bigotry hiding behind a solid screen of alleged divine inspiration.'

There was a brief silence, then Pyotr moved silently towards the door. The Grand Duke turned to him appealingly.

'Where are you going, Holy Father?' he said in a broken voice. 'Don't leave us now, when we most need your help.'

'I am going to give my help where it is most needed. I go to pray by Natalia Ivanovna's bedside.'

A red haze swam before my eyes. I became like a madman. I rushed forward and barred his path, thrusting my back against the door.

'No, Pyotr, you shall not go near her,' I shouted. 'I have had enough and to spare of your magician's art. As for your prayers, I might permit those if I thought them sincere, but I do not. The twilight between life and death is not the time for insincerity and fake piety. You and your kind are finished in this world. It is a rotten world, ravaged by war and superstition, and want and disease, but it is all you have left us. You are the last of a terrible line of grave diggers, gamblers with men's bodies and souls. Rasputin was one of you. You, the last, are one of the blackest. Natalia Ivanovna fights for her life. I and those with me have tried to stem the tide that you, in your perverted ignorance and charlatanry let loose. Where once we had firm foundations to build on, you have left us only shifting sands that can hardly bear the weight.'

'He meant well,' said the Grand Duke, trying to mollify me.

'That is always the epitaph of the bungler and the pious fraud,' I retorted.

Pyotr suddenly braced himself. He had stood straight before me as I barred his path, taking all I had to say without moving his eyes, which remained fixed on me in a penetrating stare. Now his hands unfolded and fell by his side. He bowed his head, and his words came thickly and indistinctly.

'You almost convince me you are right,' he muttered. 'But am I alone to blame? For years I have been able to conjure up to my countrymen the land they loved and have lost. Mine was the voice of the moujik, the priest, the labourer—the voice they had known in their youth and longed to hear again. Who was I to deny them the sound of that voice? And when I told them the story of the Golden Arrow, they believed it as I believed it. In our Russia these things sounded different . . . they *were* different because those who heard had a faith which had not been sapped by the rationalism and science of the West. If I have done wrong, my punishment will be heavy not only in the next world but in this. If you succeed in breaking my faith, you take away all I possess—the memory of a home to which some day I might return. Yet I must go on living. All of us must go on living, for we dare not wantonly destroy the gift that God has given us. And what is there left to us,' he asked, 'when faith—faith in the God of Russia, in a tomorrow in which the past might gloriously join hands with the future, in which the dreams of the exile would come true—is dead? Comfort yourself, my son, with the thought that God in his wisdom has given you knowledge and power. Do not deceive yourself that you possess that knowledge in spite of God. You have come to it through the ways of the West. I came to such knowledge as I have through ways that are neither those of the West nor of the East, but the ways of Holy Russia. But all these ways start from and lead back to God. Remember that. Do not blaspheme and set your wisdom above God's, man's mercy above His. Think of Natalia Ivanovna at this moment. You have done your work, you have used all the skill you can muster. But what remains? You yourself have said there is only hope. What is hope but implicit reliance on God? Man's work always comes to that sooner or later. In the end man must have faith in God. Your definition of God is not mine, but He is everywhere and in all things. Do not forget that.'

I gazed at him in amazement. He had said all this with a simple sincerity of which I had thought him incapable. When he had named God it was in a tone of humble belief, not in the manner he had adopted before of a specially inspired messenger. My rage subsided. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps in the end all of us—even the most rational and materialistic—have to rely on the working of some force and power we cannot understand or visualize. If the Russian Church, with its mediaeval language and its archaic outlook, defined God in terms no modern man could accept, that did not necessarily deny the existence of God. The exploding of the seventeenth-century chemists' mistaken belief in phlogiston did not abolish the fact of combustion.

There was silence for a little while. Then the Grand Duke looked at Pyotr and spoke in a slow, heavy voice, as though the words were being wrung from him against his volition.

'Holy Father, I think you had better go. I bear you no grudge. I still hope you will allow me to continue to call you my friend. But the present position is intolerable. Your presence reminds me of what we have lost. But I do not blame you . . . do not think that. I have been fooled, that is all.'

Pyotr span round as though he had been lashed with a whip.

'Ivan Pavlovitch . . . I . . .' he stammered. There was tragedy in his great expressive eyes. His sensitive hands writhed. I was almost inclined to pity him. His kingdom, his subjects, had fallen away from him. Like the Tsars he had served, he had been stripped of all power and been shown to be an exceedingly weak, cracked vessel.

Ivan Pavlovitch held up his hand. 'No, Father Pyotr, do not misunderstand me. I do not imply that you have fooled me deliberately. You fooled yourself, first, and you were taken in by the same thing as fooled me. You and I, Holy Father, are the victims of sentimental memories, and alas! it has taken a tragedy to make both of us see them for what they are. To me you were a window that looked out on the Russia I thought I had lost. I did not yearn for the palace with a thousand rooms, the bright uniforms, the obsequious attentions of dependants. I thought only of the peasants. I sentimentalized them. And now the window is smashed and the cold wind of reality is blowing about me. Forgive me, Holy Father, if my eyes are opened. Your world is no longer a part of me . . . I am awake. Yet I could wish I were asleep again, dreaming the dreams that have brought me happiness.'

Father Pyotr braced himself. He stood bolt upright. His face was white but calm, but his hands were still. His eyes burnt like embers in a cooling hearth. Slowly he raised his hand and made the sign of the Cross over the Grand Duke, who bowed his head.

'Bless you, Ivan Pavlovitch,' he said; and his voice held a deep vibration. 'I have served our mother Russia as well as I could. I have tried to throw the light of God into the darkness of men's souls, and it is not my fault if I find that what I thought was a shining lantern is no more than a guttering candle. We shall meet again. I shall pray continually for our dear Natalia Ivanovna and for the soul of Russia.'

He hesitated, but no one spoke. Slowly he made his way to the door, where he paused again, perhaps hoping to hear a word of farewell. But still no one spoke. The door opened and he was gone.

That was the last I ever saw of Father Pyotr, nor do I know what has become of him. He had spoken the truth. The Grand Duke had spoken the truth. For twenty years they and their kind had lived in a dream world. They had fed themselves on their own illusions. They had taken the drug of nostalgia so that they had lost the power to distinguish truth from mirage. Hitler had smashed their shadow world. When he launched his armies into Russia he did not, as he expected, break the Russian Armies, but he shattered the last fragments of the Old Russia. He made many White Russians rise above themselves and lose their partial loyalty to the past in the greater loyalty to their country.

Could I pity Pyotr for his defeat? Partly, I think, because he had taken it like a man with a suggestion of nobility that was out of character with his bare-faced charlatanry. But not wholly. He had in him an immense power of doing harm. Men of his kind spread unhappiness wherever they go, because they trade in promises they cannot redeem. Until the world is rid of charlatans and quacks of every kind, it can never be quite sane. Utopia is a long way off.

The Grand Duke brooded. He had made a decision—a terrible crippling decision for him; and he did not know if he had been wise. And Dania, too, remained silent. The ticking of my little travelling clock on the desk had the force of a steam-hammer.

It must end some time, I thought. My mind turned to the patient. What was happening there? But—I admit it—I was too afraid to go and see for myself.

And then the door opened. For a crazy moment I thought it was Pyotr coming back, Pyotr refortified by some mystic exercise. But

I was wrong. It was the nurse. One look at her face was sufficient. An outsider might have thought her calm, cold, controlled, perhaps callous. But I could read the signs beneath that professional façade.

'Well, nurse?' I said, keeping my voice even.

'Her Imperial Highness . . .' replied the girl. 'There has been a relapse . . . her condition . . .' She glanced helplessly about her. The presence of the Grand Duke embarrassed her.

The Grand Duke was quicker than I. With a cry of 'Natalia Ivanovna!' he bounded through the door with an agility that would have done credit to a man of twenty-five. Dania looked at me appealingly, tears in her eyes.

I shook my head very slightly. 'I can do no more,' I murmured. 'We took the chance and it has failed. Like good gamblers, we must not dispute the debt.'

'*Her* chance!' sobbed Dania. 'But you did all you could.'

I made my way slowly to the room. I knew Dr. Hatry would do all that could be done. My presence would only add one more to the group round the death-bed. My thoughts were bitter. I had lost. I had failed. I had failed to rise to the greatest heights that had ever been demanded of me. I tried to console myself that I had not failed as a surgeon. Though at last I had consented to operate, I had known all the time in my heart that it was hopeless. No, it was not there that I had shown myself unequal to the occasion.

I had failed—I was losing the life of an old and treasured friend—because the powers of superstition had been too much for me. I had not challenged them strongly or determinedly enough. Five months ago! That was when I should have refused to retreat. That was when I had my great chance.

But what did it matter now?

I entered the room, still but for the muffled sobbing of Ivan Pavlovitch, an old broken man now, on whom the years had suddenly descended like an avalanche. Dr. Hatry shook his head slowly. I knew what that meant. It was all over.

Ivan Pavlovitch looked up slowly. His eyes met mine, but there was no reproach in them. There was only a soft sympathy, a deep understanding.

'Thank you, George. You did what you could,' he whispered.

'If only it had not been so little,' I replied.

Yes, I had done what I could. My mind worked on. But I had not met the challenge of age-old superstition. The price had been a precious life. And I was not alone. That was the tragedy. Millions

had been unable to meet the challenge of age-old superstition. Millions had shown themselves deaf and blind to the clarion-call of light and reason. In Germany, in Italy, in Japan. . . . And the price the world was paying was not one precious life, but millions of precious lives. The Moloch of darkness was demanding his price inexorably all over the world—in the night skies over Germany, on the frozen steppes of Russia, in the dark waters of the Atlantic, on the scorching deserts of North Africa, in the arid wastes of China. . . .

I thought of Pyotr blinding men's eyes to truth by a false picture of God. I thought of Hitler blinding men's eyes with a true picture of hell. And I shuddered. When would truth prevail?

PART TWO

PASSACAGLIA ON A MARTIAL THEME

Chapter 12

The Barber

The ghosts of Imperial Russia that still walk the world are but shadows. They perpetuate her extravagance, her absurdities, her infamies, and her abounding errors. They also carry with them the goodness that was Imperial Russia's—her faith and loyalty, even when mistaken, her patience, and her long suffering. The evil will die, as all evil eventually dies, when the troubled soul has found rest. And the good will live on. In her present trials and tortures the new Russia is bringing peace of soul to the old and assimilating to herself the good virtues. The men who tied mines to themselves and then hurled their living flesh in the path of the oncoming tanks at Sebastopol, the soldiers who fought the Germans room by room for possession of a single house in Stalingrad, the warriors who held like a fence of unbreakable steel before the gates of Moscow—these would have told you that they fought for the Soviet Fatherland, for all that Lenin and Stalin had given them. But they fought, too, for something older than the Soviet Union. They fought for Russia. The Russian has never known the meaning of the word suffering when he has stood in defence of his own soil, his own home, his own people. There is a mystic bond between the Russian and his land which the sophisticated western mind cannot understand. No matter whether he be well or badly ruled, whether he be free or serf, he fights for Russia. But he rarely recognizes it. Always he believes he battles for a faith: at one time the true faith of the Holy Orthodox Church, at another for the true faith of Marx and his prophets Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. It does not matter. It is his strength and his weakness. It opens his eyes to the path of devotion, heroism, and glory; but also it closes them to the virtues of tolerance.

Yes, the ghosts of Imperial Russia are but shades. But the spirits that have haunted and possessed Nazi Germany these past eight years are real. Their cruel hands of steel have gripped a nation by the throat. Their evil whisperings have poisoned the minds of eighty million people. The Tsarist Russians are sometimes cruel, but never for the mere sake of cruelty. They created the hell of Siberia because they devoutly believed certain things: for example, that one who plotted against the Tsar blasphemed the Word of God. But the Nazis built Dachau because their belief is in cruelty and barbarism themselves. Nazism is a toxin that has entered the bloodstream of a nation, driving it to madness and that superhuman physical effort which marks some form of madness. And this living at an unnaturally heightened rate will eventually lead to collapse and perhaps death.

Nowadays, when we have read the official accounts of the German atrocities in Russia, in Poland, in Yugoslavia, in Norway, in Greece—over the entire continent of Europe—the stories that shocked us in the unarmed war of 1938–39 seem far away and unreal. Yet they were all signs of the same national disease, a highly contagious disease. Many people outside Germany had already developed the first symptoms. It took the medicine of France and the aerial blitz on Britain to kill the invading microbe. I myself was nearly ruined by the mad imaginings that are a feature of this kind of dementia.

When, with my sister, I found myself journeying across Germany by train in the late summer of 1939, I did not know that that simple trip was the beginning of trouble for me. It was a sentimental journey. It was in Germany I had found my feet as a surgeon. It was of Germany that I held many happy—as well as unhappy—memories, the memories of youthful struggles and ambitions, realized or lost. It was the sort of journey every man likes to make, even if it is only a visit to his native village. It is a sort of prophylactic for the emotions.

My sister had come with me because she wanted to see the actual scenes of events about which she had heard so much. And, of course, her presence made all the difference. It added immense pleasure to the orgy of nostalgia in which I might indulge. I could appropriate almost every place we visited to myself. My university was important not because it was world-famous as a seat of learning, but just because it was *my* university. If I had revisited by myself the old rooms in which I had spent my first poverty-stricken year, I might have been appalled by their squalor and wondered how I ever managed to live in such conditions. But with my sister standing there I could cast a cloak of glamour over them. 'Here', I could say, 'such and

such a thing happened. There', I could go on, throwing out my chest, 'I did this or that.' If she was ready to listen open-mouthed with wonder, who was I to spoil her holiday by admitting the misgivings that struggled for recognition in my breast?

A sentimental journey is two-edged. It brings pleasure but also, I think, it brings disillusion. A man has to have courage to make it, for all the sentimentalists may say. A hundred times he has fought over some battle of youth; and each time the scene has gained in glamour and romance, till a tavern brawl becomes Thermopylæ. When one returns one is seized with panic. Was it really so commonplace and sordid? Surely the place was changed? It has changed for the worse. But all too often the only thing that has changed is oneself—and that, too, perhaps for the worse.

It was not imagination, however, that much of what I saw and heard on that journey had changed. I had expected it. The new Germany was not the Germany of my youth. The Third Reich was not the Weimar Republic. It was a voyage of discovery made all the more startling because so much that was unfamiliar, foreign even, took place in an environment that was completely familiar to me. I was not sympathetic to the new Germany. My attitude was not based on sentiment. Munich had crushed me. I could feel war and the horror of war in the air. At home war had been a real but evasive shadow, something that might yet be dispersed by the light of reason. Here, in Nazi Germany, war was the reality and peace the brooding shade that one day would be blown away by the wind of fate.

There were many people at that time, especially among the leisured classes in England, who were at great pains to see the good in Hitler's régime and minimize the bad. The good could be accounted solid achievement—the *autobahnen* stretching from frontier to frontier; did no-one believe they were military roads? The wonderful physical fitness of the people, and so on. The bad could be dismissed with a characteristic English shrug. Germans were not Englishmen, therefore their habits were not the same. Concentration camps were, of course, deplorable and un-English. But, then, the Germans were, after all, only foreigners. . . .

Unfortunately my sister had been misled by this kind of rubbish. I do not say she was a fascist. She had no politics. But she was ready with excuses which annoyed me. For one thing, it emphasized the changes that I did not like and by myself might have ignored. I found myself arguing against the régime and almost going out of my way to discover its bad points, so that I could enjoy a debating triumph.

She had heard a lot about the new Germany from a friend, a man of some social standing who had turned, like so many of his class, to a kind of semi-fascism. He had told her it was only the communists in Germany who complained of a lack of free speech; and what did communists matter anyway? The people were happy and well fed, and all that fuss about 'guns before butter' was only so much hot air thrown out by politicians. If anyone doubted it, let him ask himself what had happened to the unemployed in Germany?

It was a question I had often asked myself, and I doubt if my answer would have pleased this unconscious propagandist for Hitler. Some of the unemployed were no doubt ardent supporters of the new order. But others . . . were they not in Labour Camps or behind barbed wire? Were not others wandering the face of the earth without a country, seeking food and shelter where they could? Perhaps because of my own experiences in life I was soft-hearted about the sufferings of refugees.

I tried to shift my sister from her new-found interest in politics in general and Nazi politics in particular. I told her we had come to Germany not as a committee of investigation but to see the things that outlasted all politics, wars, upheavals, and revolutions. She laughed, and told me I was getting old.

'You're living in to-day, George,' she said. 'You've always pretended to be so advanced in your views, yet now when you're in one of the most progressive countries of Europe the only things you want to look at are old ruins and ancient colleges.'

'Perhaps the other things are not what I want to see,' I replied meaningly. 'I don't want to spoil my holiday, or yours.'

'You imagine things,' she returned oracularly. 'You're far more a victim of Left propaganda than I am of fascist propaganda.'

She laughed and I had to admit she had turned the tables neatly on me. I had told her, in a moment of heat, that she had had her head turned by the glib-tongued fascist publicists.

But a train is not the place to discuss politics. Even when one has a compartment to oneself there are passers-by in the corridor. And in Germany I had good reason to believe that passers-by had very long ears. Besides, the train was nearing our destination. I broke off the discussion, letting her think she had had the best of it. Discussions that end that way are liked by women. The men, too, find them satisfactory . . . they can retire to their clubs with the superior thought that they have not wasted their wisdom in parleying with those who lack understanding.

In a very short time we were walking out of Munich station and looking for a taxi. I had no plans. I had nowhere in particular to go. But to look for a taxi is a natural thing when leaving a long-distance train. When at last a cab drew up and the driver looked at me inquiringly, I hesitated. Where should I order him to take us? It was a little too early for food. Our luggage was stored in the station. I did not feel like behaving in the manner of a tourist and telling him to drive round the town for half an hour.

A sudden thought struck me. On the spur of the moment I gave the man an address that caused him to open his eyes. It was not in the best part of the town; on the contrary, it was in one of the poorest quarters. And this was not surprising because it was an address at which I had stayed on my first visit to Germany. The old barber who had lived there had been a very good friend to me. Not only had he let me have a room at a ridiculously low rent, but he had also done his best to guide my stumbling tongue over the obstacles of the German language. Such fluency as I possess in German is due very largely to that obscure barber of Munich.

My sister looked at me inquiringly. 'Where are we going?' she asked.

'To see a very old friend . . . a barber,' I replied.

'A barber! You don't look as if you need a haircut,' she said. A sudden look of understanding dawned on her face. 'Would it be Herr Stiller?' she asked quickly.

I laughed with pleasure. She had remembered. I had often told her of Stiller's goodness to me. At the time my letters were full of it. And she remembered after all these years! I felt that this alone made my journey worth while.

'Yes,' I cried. 'I am going to spring a surprise on him.'

That was what I thought. I was going to walk into his shop and take my place among the waiting customers, shielding my face behind a newspaper. Then when at last it was my turn—there had always been quite a queue for Stiller's attentions—I would say quietly, 'Good morning, Herr Stiller'. I could imagine the look of amazement on his red, large face.

But it was my turn to be surprised. The taximan set me down before the well-remembered shop. But one glance at it was sufficient to show that Stiller did not work there any longer. It was not even a barber's. The window was filled with the more blatant examples of Nazi propaganda literature, mostly of the violently anti-Semitic kind.

Either he's gone or he's changed his profession,' said my sister, glancing at the window. 'These look to me more hair-raising than hair-cutting.'

I ignored the weak joke. I was bitterly disappointed, but I was not yet defeated. Having come so far to see my old friend I decided I had better do all I could. I walked into a small grocer's shop opposite.

'I have come a long way to see an old friend of mine,' I began to the comfortable-looking old lady who presided in the shop. 'I find he has moved... Herr Stiller... he used to have a barber's shop on the other side of the road.'

There was an instant and amazing change in her expression. The smile vanished and she grew at once firm and hard.

'You are right, *mein Herr*,' she said. 'He has gone. I should leave it at that if I were you.'

'But...' I protested, taken aback by her decisive tone.

'I can tell you nothing... nothing,' she insisted. She spoke with so much determination that I gave it up and withdrew.

It was certainly puzzling. My sister took it complacently.

'It's not so very remarkable, is it?' she asked. 'People don't always remain for ever in the same spot, you know, and it's a good many years since you were here last. Let's go and eat somewhere. You look as though it were a major tragedy, George.'

Well, it may have looked like that to her, but I was worried. Stiller was not the sort of man to move unless he was forced to; and if he had been compelled to go it could mean only one of two things; either he had fallen on bad times, in which case I wanted to find him and see if I could help, or else he had fallen foul of the Nazis. I did not like to visualize either alternative.

'It is always a tragedy to lose track of an old friend,' I said. 'I'm going to have another try... that shop over there... the fruiterer's.'

I thought I recognized the old man who was conscientiously arranging his cabbages into rows of mathematical precision. But if I did, it must have been fancy. It was clear he did not know me at all.

'Can you tell me where Herr Stiller has gone?' I asked. 'I'm an old friend of his and...'

'I can,' he replied shortly. 'But I don't advise you to go and see him. Nobody goes to see him... not even I, who have known him these thirty years. We avoid him since they let him out.'

'Out of where?' I gasped in surprise, hardly thinking of what I was saying. 'A concentration camp?'

The old man smiled grimly. 'I can see you're a stranger. If you lived here you'd know no-one ever comes out of a concentration camp. No. They were quite kind to Herr Stiller. After all, his offence wasn't as bad as all that. He went to prison for eighteen months and his wife took over the business while he was away. A pretty mess she made of it. What man would trust a woman with a razor in her hand? No, *mein Herr*, the good God never meant women to be barbers. Some of us went just to do her a good turn, and then we had to go to another barber to have the furrows taken out of our hair. Since he's come out we've given all that up. It's not wise, you understand? Still, if you say you're an old friend, and you're obviously strangers—Engländers, I should say—I suppose there's no harm or risk for you.'

'What is all this about?' I demanded. 'Tell me where he lives.'

The old man raised his bushy eyebrows at my brusqueness.

'You'll find everything changed,' he warned.

'I don't mind.'

'Very well, then.' He named an address in an area that I recognized at once as an even poorer one than where we were. I had some doubts about taking my sister there, but she insisted. She would not hear of my going alone, though she began to show signs of wanting to go back on her decision when I took her through an alley that led to a particularly squalid street.

'I wonder what he did,' I said, half to myself.

'Some petty offence,' she said, taking me up. 'It couldn't have been much for such a short sentence. Perhaps he stole or got drunk. The Germans have always been sticklers for discipline, and they're even keener than ever now.'

For some obscure reason her words reassured me. Of course Stiller could have done nothing seriously wrong! He had always been the mildest and most inoffensive of men. If the truth were known it would be found to be all a misunderstanding.

'Yes,' I said aloud. 'No doubt it's really quite trivial.'

Woman-like she immediately changed her point of view. Her indifference became at once caution.

'Perhaps after all it wouldn't be wise for us to go and see him,' she said. 'That old man seemed very doubtful and . . .'

'Oh, it's nothing,' I interposed. 'He was much too good a family man to do anything wrong. He never got into trouble with the authorities because he never allowed himself to speak openly. He was wrapped up in his home, his work, his prospects.'

'He sounds dull,' she returned disparagingly. 'If he's like that he deserves to go to prison.'

I was looking about me anxiously. Munich, the Mecca of Nazidom, had changed. The streets were only half familiar, and I am sure it was not simply the illusion caused by the years. I knew I was somewhere in the right vicinity, but I could not locate the exact spot. I stopped a passer-by and inquired.

'First on the right, second on the left,' he replied briskly. 'Who are you looking for?'

'Herr Hans Stiller,' I answered, not without misgiving.

'Third house on the left. That's easy to remember,' he went on. 'First on the right, second on the left, third house on the left. But if you're going to see him, *mein Herr*, take my warning: have a good look round before you go in.'

He bustled away leaving me gazing after him in astonishment.

'I wonder what that means?' said my sister reflectively.

I did not answer. Everyone seemed to know him, and everyone wanted to put me on my guard. There was some sort of mystery and I was determined to get to the bottom of it.

The sight of a barber's pole sticking out over a porch revived my drooping spirits. At any rate, he was still practising his old vocation. From the dark hints I had received he might have turned his attention to making bombs or forging passports. Then I remembered the sentence. A maker of bombs would, I calculated, not be allowed to languish in this backwater of the new Germany, while a forger of passports would either be shot or promoted to the Ministry of Propaganda.

We walked through the open door and came face to face with a sign indicating customers to turn to the right. Following this direction, we found ourselves in a small room containing one barber's chair, at which Stiller himself was busy with a small, tired-faced workman. In one thing this was Stiller's parlour as I remembered it: it was spotlessly clean. The taps shone, the bottles glistened like mirrors, and the basin was of a sparkling whiteness. In one thing it was quite unlike the old Stiller's parlour: there was no waiting queue. Either we had caught him at a very slack hour or his business had decreased alarmingly.

I had forgotten all about my plans. I had not bought the newspaper to shield my face. I walked in boldly, not caring who saw or heard me. Stiller barely glanced up. Certainly he gave no sign of the slightest recognition.

'No ladies' work,' he said briefly, and returned to his snipping.

We sat down, but after a little while I grew impatient and began to fidget with the single paper—an evening paper of the day before—that graced the small table. I coughed. I did all I could to attract his attention. But it was all no good. He ignored me as he always used to ignore impatient customers. Only once did he look up; that was when, in desperation, I knocked a brass ashtray—it was empty—to the floor. As it fell with a crash he glared at me, as well he might.

At last the customer was finished. He rose from the chair, wiping the back of his weather-tanned, creased neck with a towel. One peculiar thing I noticed. The man made no attempt to pay. He did not even offer a tip. He walked out of the place with his head down and without a word.

Stiller watched him go. Then he spun round and bowed politely to me.

'I recognized you, *mein Herr* . . . immediately. You should not have come. Nobody should come here . . . though I appreciate the action of those who do. You have not changed, *mein Herr*—not much. And the lady is obviously your sister. My wife is dead. Good-bye, *mein Herr* . . . good-bye. I am now closing the shop.'

He spoke oddly as though every word he said was being listened to and noted down. He seemed anxious to avoid saying anything that had any real significance. And he was obviously keen on getting rid of us. But if his words were expressionless his eyes were not. There was an appeal in them, the appeal of an animal that suffers and cannot ask in words for help.

I put my hand on his shoulder and turned him towards me.

'I'm not afraid, Herr Stiller,' I said. 'Since I saw you last I have become an Englishman. I am no longer a wanderer without home or nationality and a curious licence to be a vagrant that they call a Nansen passport. You need have no fear. Now tell me what's happened to your little business. It was so flourishing when I saw it last. There was never a time when there were not half a dozen people waiting for Herr Stiller's famous close shave—that shave that pleased us poor people because it would last a week.'

A faint smile lit up his face, and I had a glimpse of the man I used to know. But as quickly it disappeared. He became grim once more and almost furtive.

'Ah!' he sighed. 'That was long ago. Everything has changed . . . I have changed. You have changed and become an Englishman.

The whole world has changed, or is changing. And my wife . . . she is dead.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' I returned. 'I remember her well. She was always protesting that I never had enough to eat, and finding a way of giving me food so that I could not refuse out of pride.'

'She was a good woman,' he said sincerely.

'But they tell me', I went on, 'that you have been in trouble. What happened?'

'It was my second marriage,' he answered, and his mouth set.

I did not know quite how to take this. Had he offended his friends by remarrying? Had the marriage itself proved a tragic failure? Had it caused him to take to a life of crime?

'You mean', I hazarded, 'that it has been unsuccessful?'

He bridled. 'No, *mein Herr* . . . far from it. I would endure all that I have endured over again for her sake. It was these Nazis and their horrible ideas. My second wife had a Jewish grandfather. Naturally they knew of it and came to see me. They insisted I should divorce her . . . their laws make that easy, you see. It was something I could not do. They had no right to ask it, so I refused. I refused point-blank, even when they threatened and told me I was breaking their tribal laws—their "blood laws", I think they call them. Nothing would budge me. The rest is obvious.' He shrugged and pointed to his close-cropped poll. 'They gave me eighteen months' imprisonment. They also gave me this haircut, which as you can see is not the sort of thing I give my customers. They do not regard me as a "political", of course, so I was not treated as badly as I might have been. But they blacklisted my shop. Nobody dares come here except the staunchest of my friends who are quite ready to thumb their noses to these Nazis. So, you see, I cut hair and shave my friends free of charge. It does not matter,' he added, 'I have some money laid by—a little—and I like to keep my hand in.'

'I'm terribly sorry,' I said. 'I brought my sister specially to see you. I am showing her all the places that meant something to me during my years in Germany, and naturally I had to come and see you as soon as I arrived in Munich. But everything has changed, as you say.'

'Here especially,' he agreed. 'This is the headquarters of the Nazis, as you know. They rule the place with their brownshirts and their black guard. Yes, everything has changed . . . Why

should I care who my wife's grandfather was? As long as my wife is what she is . . . he might be a gorilla, for all I care. I was not a political man. I left politics alone. When they came into power I thought it was just another Chancellor in Berlin, and I shrugged my shoulders. It would be the same story, I told myself. There would be a few more broken promises and that would be all. But I was wrong. All of us were wrong.'

He broke off suddenly and looked about him in alarm, so that I was reminded again of the helpless animal caught in the wiles of cunning, cruel men.

'But what am I saying?' he asked himself. 'They warned me when they let me go: "Don't speak about your prison term," they told me. "Get on with your business."' He snorted. 'But they are clever . . . they made sure I should have no business to get on with. That explains why they made my sentence so light. My friends are my only customers, and even they dare not pay me anything. If a stranger comes in here I am on edge. He may be a Gestapo man. And I dare not so much as talk—here in my own shop. What could be more humiliating for a barber? Even my shampoo bottles have ears. The water I pour down the drain may carry my words where I do not want them to go. It is bad, Herr Sava, very bad.' He shook his head dismally.

'I can see it is. But . . .'

'I must not talk any more, *mein Herr*,' he said politely but insistently. 'I have talked too much. They may come and ask questions. They do not trust foreigners—even foreigners with British passports. I know they are waiting for me to take a false step. They hate me, not because I have broken their stupid blood laws but because I refused to bow the knee to their threats. That is the truth. And now you must go. I am sorry to seem so discourteous, but you will understand. I must shut the shop. Goodbye, *mein Herr*.'

He could not be gainsaid this time. We went slowly and reluctantly. In the street I turned to my sister.

'I warned you there would be surprises,' I said. But she did not answer.

Chapter 13

Nazi Prisoner

Neither of us spoke again for some time as we made our way back through the poverty-stricken streets. If my sister still believed that the people we passed were happy and contented, their faces must have disillusioned her. All looked depressed and hagridden. But whether it was because the Nazis had increased their burden or because the Nazis had done nothing to alleviate it, I should not like to have to decide.

It was when we were approaching a cleaner quarter that she spoke.

'Of course,' she said slowly, as though summing up her thoughts, 'it would be wrong to judge the whole of Germany on just this one case. He's probably concealing part of the truth, you know. People who've done something wrong or shady always do, so that they can excite sympathy. I can't imagine they would punish him like that simply because his wife had Jewish blood in her. It's ridiculous, isn't it?'

I did not reply at once to this. In one way, I think her words pleased me. I feared to believe Stiller's story myself. It was too grim and unpleasant. I had read of enough similar cases; but it is a very different thing when you come up against them in the flesh. My reason, however, told me it was true. My sister was salving my conscience for me, telling me what I wanted to believe . . . that things could not really be as bad as they seemed on the surface. Of course, refusing to obey the blood laws was a crime in the eyes of the Nazis, and it had been punished by imprisonment. The blacklisting of the shop and the ban on Stiller's livelihood must have been imposed for something else. It was not necessarily serious. I knew there were hundreds of regulations that might be infringed, and it was easy enough to run foul of the Nazis' political faith. I was already English enough to believe that a man cannot be punished twice for the same crime.

Curiously, though I knew I was only fooling myself, I felt better after my sister's words and my own reflections. We had reached familiar ground, and I proposed a meal at a beer garden that had once been a favourite of mine. And not only mine; it had been frequented by all the students and struggling artists and writers of Munich.

'Come along,' I cried, taking her arm. 'We'll go to old Reissen's. I expect you've heard me speak of it. It's such a gay place, but you must be prepared to endure a lot of noisy youngsters, and you mustn't mind if you bump into a duel or two.'

She laughed. She was ready for anything. I felt it was a relief for her to get away from the unpleasant situation into which, in my innocence, I had dragged her.

There was all the old familiar noise coming from the beer-garden and I clapped my hands in anticipation. This was the old Germany, the old Germany that had been both cruel and kind to me, and that held a place in my affections because it was associated with my youth. I could forgive all its unkindness which now seemed unimportant in the glowing colours of my happier memories.

'Laws and systems change,' I said philosophically, 'but beer gardens are still the same as ever. After all, there is a sacred beer cellar in this very city!'

My sister smiled rather wryly as we entered the beer garden through its ornamental porch. She looked about her keenly, noting the wooden tables and benches carved from solid pieces of oak. The place was crowded, and my memories had already suffered another shock. Everyone was in uniform. The bright unconventionality of dress that once had distinguished the place had given way to a monotony of breeches and plain tailored shirts. There were a lot of arm bands and leather belts. I wondered for a moment whether we had blundered into a bean-feast of the Brown Shirts, but I soon gathered that all the university and other students had to wear uniform. It was part of the Nazi cult, part of the ritual by which every individual person was made to feel the property of the State under its inspired Führer.

And all the rowdy greetings had gone. As each newcomer entered he was greeted with a raising of hands and a shout of 'Heil, Hitler!' There was nothing awkward about this salute. It had been well practised and gave one the impression that shoulder blades had been well oiled to make it smooth and easy.

But these were only superficialities, I decided. Underneath there was the same gaiety and carefree spirit. The place echoed with noise and laughter.

'They all look very smart,' observed my sister.

'True,' I agreed. 'But should they all wear uniforms? Isn't youth a period of freedom and revolt?'

'Oh, you're in the mood to resent anything,' she retorted. 'Herr

Stiller's stories have upset you. There's nothing sinister about them. They're just a playful lot of young men, and if you took away the uniforms you'd think you were in Oxford. I like the touch of discipline about them. It's so much better than the old convention that every young man should be a revolutionary in his dress, just to show he's grown up and got his own latchkey.'

I chuckled at this. It was good to hear her sweeping aside the surface features and getting down to the solid substratum. Munich was one of the most famous art centres in Germany, and its pre-Nazi students and youngsters had certainly presented a tatterdemalion appearance.

A waitress approached the table and held out a menu to me. But I was resolved to show my familiarity with the place. I remembered that the beer garden had been famous for its goulash, which had had a heat that devastated many an inexperienced visitor, and I was determined my sister should experience it. I also ordered light lager not the dark, heavy beer for which Munich was famous the world over.

'Meat dishes are not served to-day,' said the girl superciliously, as though astounded at my presumption. 'There's a vegetable mash made up like goulash. There are other things as well, but no meat. You are a foreigner, aren't you?'

Well, I thought, German feeding methods have changed, too, but the old superior attitude hasn't. How often in the old days I had had that *ausländer* thrown at me, as though to come from some other land was a crime in itself! And of course under Hitler the idea of German superiority was being increased. The Germans were the Master Race. It was one of the most successful of his doctrines, for every German believes it implicitly, no matter what shade the government may be.

Crestfallen I amended my order to something that I was sure was going to be tasteless and unexciting. Luckily beer was not rationed, and the lager part of my order needed no revision. The girl left sulkily—perhaps she resented having to wait on mere foreigners—and we sat back to take in the scene.

It was astonishing enough normally. Everyone seemed to be shouting at once, and it seemed as though an equal number of human beings could not possibly make any more noise. But in that I was mistaken. While we were looking on a terrific din started at an adjoining table crowded with young men in uniform. It drowned everything else and for a moment I could not make out its cause. I had noticed a man approaching the table and saluting. Immediately after this pandemonium had been let loose.

And it was not stopping at mere noise. The newcomer kicked a chair from beneath one of the men sitting at the table and adroitly suspended him by the scruff of the neck. I had seen this sort of thing in the old days, and it made me feel at home. I was beginning to enjoy myself—or so I thought. I leant across and whispered to my sister, 'Now watch the fun start!'

But the 'fun' was not exactly what I expected. I had misjudged the situation completely. My sister, who brought fresh eyes unembarrassed by memories to the scene, grasped its essentials quicker than I.

'This man looks terribly important,' she said. 'He's wearing a black uniform, and all the people at the table got up most respectfully when he approached. They saluted like a lot of soldiers on parade. Listen!'

The man was shouting at the top of his voice. He sounded like a demented sergeant-major.

'You insolent swine,' he roared, shaking the unhappy youth in his grasp. 'What did you answer when I said Heil Hitler?'

'I returned the salute,' moaned the boy. 'I stood up like the rest.' He was shaking so violently that he was almost funny. But no-one laughed. Every face was serious, with not even a small smile lurking at the corners of the mouths. A deep silence had fallen on the whole company, and everyone in the beer garden was staring at the scene. The proprietor, old Reissen, had hurried forward, wiping his hands on his napkin as though he had just washed them. He did not speak but edged up behind the newcomer. He gave the impression he was ready for instant service, whether it was to bring fresh beer or eject a rowdy customer. He cast apprehensive looks at the man, who had been addressed as Captain.

'So you said Heil Hitler, and you stood up, did you?' the black-uniformed officer sneered. 'Do you think I'm a fool—and a deaf fool at that? Do you think I haven't been treated like this before by you good-for-nothings who call yourselves artists? I know you . . . you all think you're free to say what you like and do what you like. You even think you can make a joke of our Führer's name.'

'No, no,' wailed the boy. 'Really, I did nothing of the kind. I swear I didn't. I swear it.'

The situation was getting ugly. I didn't like this man's manner, and the boy's pitiful behaviour rather upset me. I could not imagine a young man in my time allowing himself to be treated in this fashion.

'Well,' went on the captain, 'I'll give you one more chance. I am very sorry to disturb your celebrations, but you must be taught a

lesson. Don't be afraid . . . I'm not going to beat you. Now tell me, what did you say?'

The young man continued to protest his innocence in a wavering voice. He kept on repeating 'Heil Hitler!' so that it sounded like some magic incantation. But neither God nor Hitler heard him, and the captain pursued his victim mercilessly.

'Very well,' he said. 'You have not even the courage to own up. I heard you as distinctly as your friends here. What you said, you swine with the short memory, was *Zwei Liter*. You replied to my salutation by calling for two litres of beer. All right, you shall have them, at your friends' expense. Herr Reissen, be good enough to bring two litres of your heaviest beer for this young man. He is going to give us a very interesting and edifying little performance,' he added with a smile.

Reissen was ready for instant action. He sped away and in an incredibly short space of time was back with the beer in a bucket. It almost looked as though he was used to this performance. He placed the bucket at the feet of the SS man as though he were a Nubian slave setting an admirer's present of jewels at the foot of Cleopatra.

The captain nodded his thanks. 'On your knees,' he commanded in a thundering voice.

The youth did not move. His face was white and drawn, and his lips moved silently. He had made an obvious effort and suddenly stared his tormentor in the face. His expression turned from abject fear to one of contempt.

'So,' said the captain ominously. 'So you refuse to obey orders now? Is that it?'

'Better go through with it,' said one of the boy's friends in a loud aside. 'Do it, and he'll let you go.'

Still white-faced but now with renewed courage the young man stood firm.

'I shall not do it,' he said evenly. 'I said *Zwei Liter* as a joke. Everybody says it and means no harm. We're all tired of raising our hands every ten seconds as though we were performing apes in a circus. That's the truth, isn't it?'

His gaze swept round the crowd, but everyone heard him impassively. One or two glanced at each other, but whether as a sign of agreement or in amazement at his temerity I could not judge. I noticed one young man open his mouth. His lips moved but no sound came. Perhaps their minds were brave but not their hearts. They were many: the SS man but one. It would have been easy for them

to jostle the captain and allow his victim to escape. Often in my student days we had done that with an over-zealous policeman. But not one of these youngsters moved. They stood dumb and lifeless, like birds fascinated by a cobra. One or two of them edged away. Some blushed. They were ashamed, but what could they do? This was not their business. If their friend had chosen to protest he must take the consequences himself and not drag them into it.

The time for argument had passed. That was the clear decision of the captain. He approached the young man and seized him by the arms, twisting them behind the boy's back with a savage wrench. I could see the start of pain, and the colour which had begun to return drained from the youngster's cheeks.

'So you think you behave like an ape, do you?' growled the captain. 'Perhaps you are right, though the cause you give is not the right one.' He twisted the imprisoned arms again. 'And you would call apes all those who honour their Fatherland and their Führer would you? Very well, we will look into this. Get down on your knees like the animal you are and drink those two litres you ordered.'

He bent the boy's body by the force of his own, and neatly tapped his ankles. The boy fell forward and thrust his face against the bucket.

My sister looked at me. There was horror in her eyes. 'This is going too far,' she said. 'The boy was a fool to insult the policeman, but this is beyond a joke.'

'He's not a policeman,' I returned. 'If he was the fellows would have dealt with him; I'm sure of that. He belongs to the political army, and that young man has sinned against political etiquette. He has been guilty of the greatest crime of all: he has shown independence of mind and spirit.'

'But surely you're not going to let him get away with that?' she asked. 'You must do something. Can't you tell the captain it was just a joke? Do something, George . . . you must!'

'I suppose I must,' I said dubiously. I was not anxious to interfere in this affair. 'That man wouldn't see a joke if you talked to him for a week. But I suppose I'd better try.'

The youngster's face had now been pushed into the bucket.

'Drink!' commanded his tormentor, 'or you'll drown. Drink to the level of your nose, or I'll keep your head in the bucket till you do.'

Though the young man struggled valiantly, nothing he could do was of any avail against the weight of the SS guard who, with practised ease, placed his knee in the small of his victim's back.

I plucked up my courage and strolled across to the captain with as much nonchalance as I could command. Unfortunately I knew that my assumed calm was not very convincing.

'I am a doctor,' I said, saying the first thing that came into my head. 'Perhaps I can help you.'

The captain smiled at me. 'He doesn't need a doctor—yet,' he said significantly. 'But he will if he doesn't drink.'

I checked myself from saying that it was the tormentor and not the victim who stood in greater need of a doctor.

'I think you ought to let him go,' I insisted. 'It's dangerous to hold him in that position. He can't drink while you've got him doubled up.'

I tried to be as conciliatory as I could. This young fool deserves punishment, I tried to suggest without saying it—surely it's better to do the job thoroughly?

'You're pressing his thorax on the rim of the bucket, and you're also overlooking the fact that it's difficult to drink upwards.'

The man lost his smile. He glowered at me. 'Herr Doktor,' he said slowly, 'I don't want any advice from you.' As if in illustration he pushed the youth's face deeper into the bucket. 'This man is obstinate. I am teaching him a lesson that is for his good. It will serve as an example to any of the others who feel like saying "*Zwei Liter*" instead of Heil Hitler.'

'He's bad enough . . . unless you want a corpse on your hands,' I said, my temper roused by the man's utter indifference and brutality. I bent down and pushed the bucket aside.

The SS man made as if he was about to strike me, and then thought better of it. Instead he kicked the boy out of the way and made a grab at me. I shook off his grip.

'You are under arrest for interfering with the cause of justice,' he bawled.

'This is not justice,' I shouted in return. 'But it is better you should arrest me than kill that boy.' I dragged my passport out of my pocket. 'I am a British doctor,' I went on more calmly, thinking it time to protect myself. 'Arrest me if you like and notify the nearest British consul. I shall explain my action to him and to your superiors.'

'So!' The captain spat the word at me. 'A British doctor, are you? And you dare to interfere with us Germans and our German justice! Well, we shall see. You cannot insult Germany like this . . . not now. This is Munich, not Versailles. One day you and all Britishers will see what German justice means.'

My sister had now approached but I checked her intervention.

'Very well, Herr Policeman,' I said, remembering her phrase with satisfaction. 'Lead the way to your cells, but you are hardly raising my opinion of the new Germany and her ways. I was here before, you know, when Germany was a civilized country.'

'So you were?' he sneered. 'As a tourist, I suppose, seeing the quaint little towns of the Rhine and admiring the toymakers in the Black Forest. You thought the Germans had become soft fools and . . .'

'No,' I broke in impatiently. 'I always found the Germans a brave and resourceful people. I have been a student here and have never been a tourist. I know this place from of old. We had fights and quarrels, but I never saw anything like this.'

'Times have changed, Herr Doktor,' he said.

'So I see. In my time Germans fought with swords in duels, not with their boots. But perhaps you were never a soldier.'

'I am a soldier of the Führer,' he retorted quickly, stung by my words. 'I follow where he leads—even if it be to England.'

'Where we should welcome you cordially,' I replied. 'I could show you policemen who are not bullies and do not need to go about heavily armed because they are respected friends of the people. We have a quick way in England with bullies, Herr Captain. It is efficacious, but I do not ask you to ask for it. You have a large enough area to kick.'

I was being utterly, ridiculously foolish. I was piling trouble up for myself in good measure and making the worst of a bad situation. Every word I said was no doubt being photographed on this man's memory. The size of my fine would mount and mount and would have to be paid not in my traveller's marks but in good foreign currency, for which the Nazi régime had an insatiable appetite.

'Follow me,' commanded the SS man. 'If you try to escape I shoot.'

'Apologize, you idiot,' whispered my sister. 'You're behaving like an imbecile. Heroics won't get you anywhere.'

'Why should I apologize?' I asked in a loud voice. 'The apology is due to me, and I expect his superior will make it. It is one of the trials of superiors that they have to apologize for underlings. There must be some reasonable men left in Germany.'

I was marched away. I expected to be taken to the police station which was only a short distance away. But I was conducted right past that building. I was to learn that this was not a matter for the police but one for the Party's jurisdiction. In Munich especially, insults to the Party had to be dealt with according to the Party's own sense of justice and values.

I was not, however, taken to the famous Munich Brown House. The place for which I was destined was some district headquarters, a squat two-storied building that looked like the barracks it was. I was put into a small anteroom in the care of two SS men (who fingered their heavy revolvers incessantly) and left to wait in patience for an hour or more. No doubt this was all part of the technique of intimidation.

At last I was brought before the district leader. He was a stern-faced man, with the scar of an old wound across his left eye. It gave his face a curiously sinister twisted expression.

'Your offence', he barked, 'is very serious. You have publicly insulted one of our special police. It is regarded as treason against the German people. Punishment is prescribed for that offence, and it is very serious.'

He spoke in good English, with a clipped accent.

Then he called on the captain to read out his report. It was very detailed. My remarks were recorded verbatim, and they gave me quite a lot of satisfaction. I did not know I had quite so much courage. Throughout the whole recital the commandant remained completely impassive. If he hoped to impress me with his judicial air he was quite mistaken. I had heard a lot about Brown House justice.

Then came the question I had been expecting.

'You are of Russian origin, I presume?' asked the commandant tapping my passport.

I nodded. 'Does it condemn me?' I countered cheerfully. Things looked so bad for me that I could enjoy myself to the utmost. There was no need for politeness, it would get me nowhere, and I might as well have the pleasure of speaking my mind.

'No, it does not condemn you.' He shrugged. 'There are Russians and Russians. Not all of them are communist scum. But it explains quite a lot. Your insulting behaviour towards my chief of staff was hardly that of an English gentleman.'

'No,' I agreed. 'No doubt an English gentleman, having been brought up to play the game, would have used his fists. I relied on words. But does it matter?' I looked at him with half a smile. 'Could you expect anyone to stand by while your chief of staff, as you call him, was deliberately killing a boy?'

'That is a matter on which I am not fully informed. As a doctor you should know better than I. But I think you have exaggerated the whole affair. We have a code of discipline in Germany now. It makes us strong and a duty-conscious race. Boys must suffer—and men, too, if necessary—when they will not learn by other means.

You have no right whatsoever to interfere in our domestic affairs, Herr Doktor, especially as I understand you enjoyed our hospitality for a good many years.'

'We will not discuss the merits of your hospitality, as you call it, Herr Commandant,' I returned. 'In any case, Nazi Germany is not the Weimar Republic as you have reminded me, though I did not need it pointed out. It has changed—and not for the better.'

'I think, Herr Sava,' he said, his eyes blazing, 'you will be well advised not to insult the German Reich so openly. It might lead to your being mistaken for a propagandist—a communist even, with such a name and such a background. We might even be forced to search your effects and find incriminating documents—such as money destined to be smuggled out of the country.'

I took in his meaning at once. Currency offences were punished very heavily, and they could be made an easy excuse for prosecution.

'I cannot say what you might not find,' I said, emphasizing the 'you' slightly. 'Those who hide can find, as an English proverb says. You would have to prove your case.'

'Our judges would decide that,' he answered. 'But there are plenty of ways of making your visit here memorable.'

'I am resigned,' I said. 'I only ask you to remember that I am a British subject.'

'Of Russian origin. Perhaps the British Government is not so anxious to concern itself with the affairs of every foreigner with a British passport. We shall see. I advise you to prepare for a heavy sentence. As a foreigner you may escape death, but we shall look after you well for the time you are in our hands.'

'I have no doubt of that.'

He made a sign and I was led away.

In my life I have endured many unpleasant experiences. I have known hunger—starvation even. I have been without food and clothes or the money to buy them. But I have never been so uncomfortable as during my stay in that place. My jailers were sadists. They came again and again to my cell and tried third-degree methods on me, though they never resorted to open violence. Perhaps even then a British passport counted for something. On the third day, when I was beginning to wonder whether the British consul was quite powerless, I was taken before the commandant. He eyed me severely.

'There is only one way to deal with your offence,' he said sternly. 'You will be tried before the People's Court in Munich.'

I refused to show any signs of dismay at mention of that ominous place where justice was turned topsy-turvy and the guilty judged the innocent. Inside me, however, I had a sinking feeling.

'Very well. No doubt it will be better than being judged by you,' I said.

'Perhaps. But it can mean only two sentences: death by the axe or life imprisonment. No doubt you will wish to make arrangements.'

'I have none that concern this country.'

'Not even the disposal of good German marks?'

'No.'

He looked at me queerly, as though sizing me up. Perhaps he was thinking how he might obtain some pleasant sign of fear from me. I do not say I was not appalled at the prospect he held out, but I do say that I was resolved, as I had never been before, to show no signs of giving in to this pathological sadist, whose one idea was to make me cringe before him.

'Herr Sava,' he said suddenly, 'we have decided to release you. That is what you want, isn't it?'

I thought it was another trick to torture me.

'Well,' I asked, 'why have you decided that?'

'Because we are a generous and just people, Herr Sava. We realize that the German way of life is not that of the rest of the world, and that what is a serious crime in a German cannot be heavily punished in one who has not seen the truth. The time will come maybe when the German way will be followed all over the world, but until that time we must be tolerant. Your sister and the British consul are waiting for you. Come this way, please.'

He chuckled as he led the way. I was nonplussed. Was this some new trick, some fresh effort to browbeat me? Was he seeking to sow false hopes in me so that I might be cast down by the crop of disappointment that would spring from them?

I could hardly believe my eyes when he showed me into a room in which my sister was standing talking to a tall, calm-looking man, who was obviously a British consular official.

The commandant turned to me. 'You are free, Herr Sava, but I must ask you to be good enough to leave this town within twenty-four hours, otherwise we shall have to take strong action. We have for the moment no further occasion to detain you. But let me give you a word of advice: next time you come to Germany remember that the Reich will not tolerate any interference from foreigners of indefinite race and history like yourself. To-day we have other and

weightier matters to occupy us; to-morrow it will be different and we shall have no need of tolerance or forbearance towards those who openly insult and ridicule us. Good day, Herr Sava. Mr. Consul, I hand him over to you, and I ask you to see that my orders are obeyed.'

'Before you go, Herr Commandant,' I said, 'may I assure you that I shall not come again to Germany till she is the free land I once knew and admired. In the meantime, I do not need your orders to leave not merely Munich but the country as soon as I can find a train to take me out of it.'

The consul had listened to these exchanges with an embarrassed air. As soon as we were outside he warned me of the dangers of not keeping a tight rein on one's feelings in the New Germany. He confessed that he himself often had the desire to kick, and kick hard, not merely at the innumerable regulations but also at the officials who enforced them.

'I understand,' I said. 'But what was I to do—let the boy drown before my eyes?'

He shook his head. 'That is only one of the problems that Nazi Germany is posing,' he said sombrely. 'The answer is not obvious . . . nor are the answers to the others.'

With that he shook my hand and left, after impressing on me the need of getting away as soon as possible.

. . . . .

As the evening train bore us on our way to Paris I reviewed the whole situation. It had been ugly and unpleasant, but I had only myself to thank for it. I might at least have waited till the boy was in imminent danger, and I could certainly have moderated my language considerably in talking to the SS man. Against these debits I could set the doubtful asset of having learnt just a little of what imprisonment and third-degree examination by the Nazis could be. At any rate, I had now a sounder criterion on which to judge the stories of refugees and the spate of anti-Nazi literature that was flooding the market.

Paris was enjoying a minor heat wave when we arrived there, and my sister spent some time in shopping in the woman's paradise. It was late August and the talk everywhere was of war. The cafés were crowded, and the favourite drinks were iced coffee and apéritifs in which miniature bergs bobbed and floated. I had chosen one of the latter, while my sister was busy with some highly coloured ice-cream concoction that had promoted lazy thoughts in my mind

of the infinite versatility of the confectioners and the infinite patience of the human digestive system.

Everywhere was noise. People talked, argued, read aloud from newspapers, flirted, and laughed. And suddenly, as though by magic, there came a hush. It was as though the whole assembly had been struck senseless by some heavy blow.

It was a newspaper seller who had caused this abrupt silence. He held aloft a copy of *Paris Soir* so that all could see the headlines. His stentorian voice compelled attention.

'Russo-German Pact of Non-Aggression Signed To-day,' he yelled.

At last even his shouts were unneeded. Every eye was focused on his paper. Here and there a laugh rang out, merry and innocent, but it came from the world outside, the world of the promenading boulevardiers, and it sounded unreal, like a faun's.

As quickly as the silence had descended babel broke out once more. First there was the rustling of paper as every hand stretched out for a copy. Then the first trickle of amazed exclamations which grew into a mighty, roaring torrent of comment, recrimination, abuse and disbelief.

It is old game now, that Russo-German Pact. The world-wide wonder that it caused has been forgotten in the greater wonder of Russian resistance to the concentrated strength of Germany's 'invincible' Wehrmacht. I recall the ejaculations around me, and they seem odd, like the dialogue in some half-forgotten book that one never really enjoyed. Most people cursed Russia and all her ways. She was betraying civilization. She was giving Germany permission to go to war. She was playing her own game, regardless of the opinion and needs of the free world. She was a traitor and a deceiver. One or two suggested that because Russia had declined to join France and Britain, it did not necessarily mean that she was against those two countries; Russia, they suggested, was buying time—time to prepare, to arm, to consolidate. But these opinions were dismissed as the tendentious propaganda of socialists who could not face facts.

I left the café bewildered. The news had hit me hard. For I knew exactly what some of the White Russian émigrés would make of this. They would see in it signs of a Russian capitulation to Germany, and they would become unconscious agents for Hitler in putting him forward as the saviour of Europe. That, as I have shown in the first part, is what happened. None of us could see the upshot or anticipate the rush towards Moscow. We could not even see what the next few weeks might bring.

After my experiences in Germany, which had far from rested me, I felt disquieted and dispirited. I wanted to escape; and when I suggested to my sister that we should snatch a few days in Italy before returning to England I found her in exactly the same mood. Both of us had friends there, and the promise of warm sun and bright skies appealed to us.

Certainly Paris was not the place for anyone in search of peace of mind. There was no mistaking the dark clouds on the political horizon. Strange rumours were in the air, and I grew heartily tired of the words '*la guerre*'. The German Press had already begun its infamous atrocity campaign against Poland. There were riots in various places. First President Roosevelt, then the Pope, made an appeal for peace—rather, as it seems now, like an agitated old lady appealing to growling dogs not to fight.

The British Fleet had been mobilized—so the rumour-mongers said. The French manned the Maginot Line with that belief in its impregnability and the superiority of defence which was to bring a great nation to disaster. Yet in spite of all, people believed that there would be no war. The optimism of pessimism grew like a dark flower in every corner, and the self-appointed sensible ones of the earth announced boldly that war was impossible, Hitler bluffing, and the whole thing just another 'crisis'.

Our hopes of relaxation from these worries in Italy were doomed from the start. As we headed south the rumours grew, but the farther south we went, the more their colour changed. Now it was Mr. Chamberlain who was the war-monger, the French and British who were the dangers to the peace of Europe, while President Roosevelt was derided coarsely as 'that busybody paralytic'. Even the Pope was told that the Vatican walls were sacred only for so long as he obeyed orders.

But the sun was warm and we managed to persuade ourselves that there was still hope in the world. We did our best to be gay and light-hearted, but it was impossible. After less than a week we were on our way home, waiting for the boat-train that would put us on board ship for Dover.

Three days later Mr. Chamberlain spoke to the nation. Once again, for the second time in the life of my generation, the dark clouds of war had burst and threatened to engulf the world in their hot, red rain.

What had started as a sentimental journey had ended in the tramp of armies on the march. . . .

Chapter 14

Casualties

Back in London the whole familiar daily round seemed suddenly to have become unfamiliar. London was not itself. It had emptied. Blocks of luxury flats stood half-empty or more, their tenants having evaporated overnight. Business had come almost to a standstill—except for the brisk search for blackout materials, a search that was the nation's first taste of a phase of war shopping later to become only too regular. But the emptiness of London, despite its still enormous crowds, was nowhere made more plain that in the practically complete absence of children.

I had seen some of them go. There had been laughing children and weeping children, children with their mothers, and children all alone making their first journey into the unknown under a threat from the skies that most of us expected to break at any moment. That scene was perhaps the grimmest of the first phase of war. It underlined that this was to be 'total' war, though at the time we did not know what total war really meant, and that the front line was just as likely to be in the shopping streets of London or Manchester or Bristol as on the plains of France. If we did not realize how close war was to come to us, we did sense something of its nearness. The barrage balloons, giving an unexpected beauty to the sky, suggested to us that the Angel of Death was hovering not so far away.

If there had been any great break with life as we had known it, London might not have appeared so strange. It was the caricature that gave the sense of unfamiliarity, as though an old friend who had always worn a bowler hat suddenly appeared in a jester's cap and bells, but without changing his neat, black overcoat. Our milk was still brought to us in the morning with accustomed regularity; but the milkman unharnessed his horse and tethered it to the rear of the cart. Policemen still directed traffic, answered questions, and flirted gravely with cooks and housemaids; but the tall, sweeping headgear that had been their pride had been replaced by squat, steel helmets. These same helmets became suddenly ubiquitous. Respectable citizens who bought their clothes from City tailors put

them on at night and patrolled the streets as air-raid wardens. Bus conductors had them. There were black ones and grey ones, white ones and blue ones. Every citizen except myself seemed to have one.

And if there were strange grotesqueries, there were also strange unsuspected beauties. The silver-grey balloons floating against the sunset, their bellies turned to soft pink. The glitter of the stars against a background of velvet blue, like diamonds set in the gown of some lovely woman. The broad sweep of a searchlight as it drew aside the veil of night. These were more than compensation for the loss of vivid mercury lights in the streets and the multicoloured sky-signs of Piccadilly Circus.

When I tried to pick up the threads of my work I found that this too had become distorted. Many of the hospitals stood with more than half their beds empty, waiting for the casualties that were expected from the anticipated raids—casualties that would be brought in in motor coaches withdrawn from public use. Surgeons, of course, were urged to come into the Government's emergency medical scheme at nominal salaries. Most accepted the invitation, but a few held out. There are those in all professions and walks of life who, worldly wise, look so far into the future but not far enough. They believed, these men, that they could continue to draw their large incomes till the time of crisis came, when they considered that the Government would have to buy their services at any price they chose to name. It was not patriotic perhaps, but it was neither more nor less reprehensible than the conduct of those people who, having money to invest, would not lend to the nation because two-and-a-half per cent was not a big enough return. Neither the doctors nor the rentiers realized that the day of privilege was fading, and that whatever happened in the war it was unlikely they could ever go back to where they were before. Later, some of these reluctant surgeons came into the fold, when there was nothing to do, and £600 or £900 a year (according as one was an assistant or a chief surgeon) to be had from it—and no interference with private practice.

That was how some of us felt at the time, but events proved everyone wrong. Many of those who were abused as slackers and money-grubbers became heroes in the Blitz: men who worked in the theatres till they reeled and dropped through sheer fatigue, men who fought with the armoury of healing for lives that were in grave danger through Hitler's armoury of destruction and terror. War changes all things, not least men's characters and our estimations of them.

Step by step, the unfamiliar became familiar once more. Step by step some of the practices of peace were restored. The cinemas reopened. Faint lights twinkled again on lamp-posts, giving a cheerful suggestion of light without the reality. The less timorous and the less dutiful began to leave their respirators at home. . . .

Against all this the adventure of those days just before the war seemed remote. I tried, with many others, to persuade myself that a sharp dividing line had been drawn; on one side was pre-war, on the other the present. Everything in the pre-war stage was dead and done with. The future was going to be different—strange perhaps, but different and better.

As for the war, it did not produce any striking events. It was remote and unreal as the affairs of August, 1939. Somewhere out in France two armies faced each other, one behind the shelter of the Maginot Line, the other safe in the defence of the Westwall. Meanwhile, our blockade would do the trick, as it had in 1918, when vast armies had faced each other from the shelter of lines of embattled trenches. . . .

But the fire was only smouldering. It was a mistake to imagine that it had never been properly lighted. It was to break into its first bright flames in Norway and show that the Polish campaign had been something more than a flash from a match.

War has very curious effects, especially war that has no overt excitement. People become introspective and self-analytical. Conventional barriers are removed and long-repressed urges break loose. Patriotism was the fashion; but with no clear focus it took many strange forms. There were some who thought it a vague echo of Hitler's own fantasies. They started a private war of their own, a war that had Jews as the enemy. These blind, foolish people did not see that they were propagandists for the enemy, unofficial auxiliaries of his Fifth Column. . . .

This war had its casualties—its victories, as its prosecutors no doubt would have called them. Its weapon was the anonymous letter, the appeal to fear.

One Jewish surgeon who had made a speciality of a very obscure branch of medicine and had achieved some fame as a writer fell a victim. He was not an immediate casualty. He held out for quite a time. I was in his confidence and he came to see me frequently to tell me of the warning letters he had received. If they had been illiterate he might have ignored them altogether. But they were not. They were obviously the work of cultured and educated people. The

movement—if it can be dignified by that title—had, in fact, very influential support.

'I've had another to-day,' he would say with a worried frown. 'This one tells me that when the war is over this country will "clean up" all Jews. It tells me, too, that I've been black-listed because I've preached immorality . . . my book, I suppose. I know it shocked a few narrow-minded people. What ought I to do?'

'Ignore it,' I would answer in the confident tone of a man who is not the victim of blackmail. There is none so courageous as he who has no immediate danger to fear.

As time went on he grew more and more worried. He would just shake his head at me dismally, and I would understand. That gesture indicated that the attack was being maintained. The head-shakes became more frequent. They became also more downhearted. I judged the offensive was being pressed home.

Then came the fall of France and Dunkirk. Britain stood alone, the enemy within sight of her shores. The situation was appalling. Invasion seemed only a matter of time. We no longer believed that Germany's morale was weak and that the Army generals were longing for a chance to have their own back on the perfidious Nazis.

I met my surgeon friend one afternoon. He was looking drawn and pale. If ever a man walked in fear, he was that man. His once confident air had become furtive. He was like a man accursed.

'They'll be here any time now,' he said. 'You know what they think of Jews . . . and I've been black-listed. I had another letter this morning. It says frankly that I shall be one of the first the Nazis will lay hands on, and that no true Englishman will raise a hand to help me. But why, Sava, why?' He slapped his hand on his head. 'I am as English as anyone. I was born here. I have studied here . . . worked here all my life. It is infamous!'

'It's devilish,' I agreed. 'But why pay so much attention to it? These people have unmasked themselves. They are Hitler's agents. They put Hitler's creed before their duty to their country. They must be discovered and denounced! Tell the police.'

He shook his head, and I pressed him. His nerves had been stretched to breaking-point. He felt he had had every detail of his life spied upon. Everyone he met might be a secret enemy, distorting his most innocent actions into something sinister. But at last he began to see reason.

'I mustn't act hastily,' he muttered. 'I'll think things over.'

I did not see him for several days. The days became weeks. It was

unusual, for I usually ran across him fairly often. I was busy at the time and I did not realize how quickly the weeks had passed by. At last I made enquiries. I went to a doctor who had always been closely associated with my Jewish friend.

'Where's Marker?' I asked. 'What's happened to him?'

He looked at me in blank astonishment. I felt I had asked him whether he knew Queen Anne was dead.

'My dear fellow', he replied, leaning back in his chair, 'haven't you heard? I thought everyone knew. He's gone . . . skedaddled . . . cleared out.'

'Cleared out?' I gasped.

He nodded. 'Yes. Thrown up his practice and gone to Australia. Left some of his patients half treated. Scandalous, isn't it?'

'But why?' I asked. I knew very well, but the question slipped out.

'Yellow,' he said. 'I hate Americanisms, but that's the only *mot juste*. He knew Hitler and his anti-Jewish gang were only just across the Channel, and he thought they were coming here soon. So he went . . . like that.' He snapped his fingers in the air.

'I see,' I said slowly.

'It's a pretty bad show,' he went on. 'I'm no Jew-baiter, but it's things like that that give them a bad name. He might have tidied up his cases. You know his speciality. Who's to take it on?'

I shook my head, declined the drink I was offered, and left.

I do not think the doctor knew the truth. Marker had been driven to a frenzy. He was mad with fear. But it was not simply fear of what might happen if Hitler came. It was the dark fear that is built up by the threat of the unknown, the disorder of a mind that has been strained to breaking-point. Without those letters, I feel certain he would have stayed like the rest of us. But his nerves had been broken by fiends who had not the courage to come out with an open accusation.

He had sacrificed much. He had a practice worth several thousand pounds a year. He was quite well known to the general public. His speciality was one which, as my informant had suggested, few if any could handle. I could not judge him harshly. It is easy to call another man a coward, not knowing what exactly he had had to face. 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all,' is a tag that has been worn threadbare, but it has suffered that fate simply because it enshrines a great profound truth. The enemy from without most of us can persuade ourselves to meet; but the enemy from within—

the overwrought mind, the wounded soul—is difficult to withstand because he is with us always, never giving us rest or peace. Hitler knows it. He has won many of his victories by it. He has magnified the power of his armies in the eyes of his enemies by attacking first at their minds and beliefs.

If that surgeon was not one of the Nazis' casualties, he was one caused by Hitler's friends. The hand that wrote those letters was guided by the same thoughts, the same motives, as produced *Mein Kampf*. And Marker fell because certain people of English blood preferred the teaching of Hitler to the culture of their own land, the culture that allowed them to think their evil thoughts without fear of the concentration camp or the firing squad.

He was not the only casualty of this kind at that seething time. Many of the most guiltless and blameless of people in normal times turned informer and brought suffering and dismay to the innocent.

This incident left a nasty taste in my mouth. It would have been bad enough had it been isolated, but there was plenty of evidence that it was not. And officials blundered through good intentions no less than busybodies caused suffering through sheer maliciousness.

After the attack on Norway, the affair of Quisling, and the success of German arms in France, there was a general and understandable tightening up of regulations against aliens. Their countries had been subdued very largely because part of the population had been more friendly to Hitler and his lying mysticism than faithful to the lands of their birth. Fifth Column and Quisling became realities and not mere figments of the imagination. The threat of invasion hung very close to the British Isles, and there was a grim determination that, if the German armies came, there should be no traitors to ease their way.

Refugees, of course, were among the first suspects and easiest targets. In the hospitals where I worked, and through my contacts in the foreign circles in London, I had first-hand evidence of many cases of hardship. Men who had voluntarily surrendered their all in Germany and the central European countries because they preferred to be aliens in a strange land rather than live under the heel of the Nazis were taken into internment camps. Many of these were eager to serve the British cause—or rather the cause of international freedom that they believed was Britain's. It was not so much that they were subjected to any grave physical hardship; the worst British internment camp is not a Nazi concentration camp. Rather the shock was psychological. They felt they had escaped from one brand of prejudice and injustice only to find another.

The great round-up, as it was called, came to these victims of Hitler as the last indication that the world had gone mad. Some of them tried to make the best of it. They realized that there were still too many unfriendly people at liberty, and they were prepared to take the suspicion that fell on them philosophically. They believed that eventually British justice would rise above prejudice, and that those who had a desire to help would be set free. They were even ready to endure internment for the rest of the war if it made certain that Hitler's allies in our midst should have no chance of doing harm.

But there were others who could not take this point of view. These were the ones who had suffered most at Hitler's hands—the real victims of Nazi brutality. Their nervous resistance had already been reduced to a low level by what they had undergone in Germany, and they could not face any fresh trials. Among these there were many suicides. War spreads tragedy and suffering blindly. If fate is blind, then Mars has no control whatever over his actions; he lays about him and anyone within range is smitten down.

There was one family of refugees in whom I had taken considerable interest. I had known them in Germany when I was a student, and had always admired their sturdy honesty and good nature. The man was a firm believer in the cause of freedom; his wife was a charming cultivated woman. At the beginning of the Nazi régime he had been imprisoned for some trifling offence against the multitude of regulations, and as time went on, after his release, he found conditions growing less and less tolerable. He had remained in his native town as long as he could, because he believed by staying there he could help others who, like him, wanted to see Germany free of the horror that had been fastened on her. But at last he saw it was hopeless. He realized war was coming, and he did not wish to be forced to fight for a cause he detested. He believed the future of Germany would be better served if he worked against the German armies under the supreme command of Hitler.

It was the summer of 1939 when he came to England. I could see that the wrench of parting with their home and leaving the country for which they had so deep an affection had caused them great suffering. I did my best to help them. When war came they had almost reconciled themselves to a life of exile and believed that a friendly England had adopted them. Their gratitude for their kind reception was at times almost pathetic. They registered, of course, as aliens, but there was no difficulty in getting them placed in

Category C; that is to say, they were regarded as friendly though of enemy origin, and the minimum of restrictions was placed upon them. The man volunteered for the Pioneer Corps when that unit was thrown open to friendly aliens, while the wife secured work in a canteen and felt she was doing something useful in serving hot tea and Oxo to troops and A.R.P. workers. At the time of the round-up the man was waiting his call-up for the Pioneer Corps.

Then the blow fell. In most cases the police struck swiftly and without warning. But, of course, they could not detain everyone, and the news leaked out that all aliens of enemy origin were to be interned. At first my friends, the Züchens, could not believe it. They could not bring themselves to accept that a country which had treated them so handsomely could fall to the level of the Nazis. They felt there must be some sort of discrimination and that the innocent could not be punished along with the guilty.

Unfortunately I had seen enough of what was happening to know that their faith was misplaced. One of those panics that always afflict nations at war was sweeping the country. Everyone whose name had the slightest foreign sound was becoming a suspect, a potential ally of the all-insidious Nazis.

One morning quite early I received an emergency call to the hospital. I jumped into my car and covered the distance in record time.

'What is it?' I asked of my assistant, as I made a hurried change.

'Suicide pact, sir,' he replied. 'Mr. Cozens is dealing with one of them.' Cozens was one of my colleagues. 'The man looks pretty bad, but the woman should pull through if we're quick.'

'Everything ready?'

He nodded. 'Mr. Cozens is already dealing with the woman. He's left the more difficult to you.'

'That's his privilege,' I said. 'He's the senior.'

I went as fast as I could to the casualty ward. My assistant gave me odd details as I sped along the corridor.

'It's gas,' he explained. 'Gas . . . and a razor. That's the trouble.'

'Deep?' Razor slashings are not pleasant things to handle.

'The man's . . . yes. He made a good job of himself,' said the young man ghoulishly. 'The woman's is not so deep.'

'I'll have a look at him before I take him to the theatre.'

My head reeled as I looked at the casualty. It was not simply that he was in a terrible condition. I recognized him. He was my old friend Züchen. His case was desperate, and I began to give brisk orders.

'Get those bandages off,' I said. 'I must try a pipe in the trachea, I expect. No time for moving him, so make him as comfortable as you can. Get the anaesthetist . . . and everything.'

But even then I realized it was hopeless. Züchen was still breathing, but the respiration was laboured, and there was an ominous gurgling sound. When I saw the large red gap in his throat I abandoned what little hope I had. The man looked at me through the film of death that was already forming on his eyes. I think he recognized me, for he moved his lips, but no sound came. The blood rushed to his mouth and he lay still. I spoke to him softly, but his only answer was the expiration of his last breath.

I turned away, disgusted. Was it for this, I asked myself bitterly, that he had suffered voluntary exile and, against all his natural inclinations, thrown himself into a fight against his own countrymen so that the truth and beauty of life might triumph?

My thoughts turned to the other case. Somewhere in the hospital was Frau Züchen. I wondered how things were going with her and hastened to the theatre.

Cozens was making a splendid fight of it. He had performed an elaborate tracheotomy on her thorax, introducing a tube through which she could take air into her lungs. The cut in her throat was not nearly so deep as her husband's, but the epiglottis had been nearly severed at one point and she could draw only minute quantities of air into her lungs. But the main difficulty was not so much the introduction of air as the expulsion of the coal-gas from her system. When I arrived Cozens and his assistant were applying artificial respiration.

Cozens gave me a quick glance. 'I can do nothing more until I've got the gas out of her,' he said. 'It's no use as it is. Tell me, Sava, what would you advise?'

I was surprised. Cozens was a good surgeon, but he was not the sort of man to ask advice, still less to take it. But he looked played out. Beads of sweat stood out like glistening pearls on his brow, and he was breathing hard with his exertions.

'I don't think there is anything you can do,' I replied. 'You have done everything mortal man can do. Her husband's dead. I couldn't save him. The cut was too deep.'

'I've managed the cut,' he added. 'I've stitched the incision and put a tube in. But her lungs are getting engorged with blood. Do you think we could operate and collapse one of them?'

'Is she strong enough?'

'That's the doubt . . . but it's her only chance.'

I nodded, though I did not agree. There were other methods, other chances that might be taken. But I knew her. I knew she would not want to live when her husband had died as he had. I could visualize the whole scene that led to this tragedy . . . the abandonment of hope, the realization that nowhere in the world was there a hope for either of them.

'I know this woman, Cozens,' I said suddenly. 'She's a refugee . . . Class C, but you know they're sweeping them all in. I can't see the point of saving her for an internment camp now that her husband has gone.'

He did not look up. His eyes were focused on the patient. He nodded slightly. A few minutes later she died, peacefully, still under the anaesthetic.

'I did my best,' Cozens said half-defensively.

'No man could have done more or better,' I assured him.

I walked into the changing room. Cozens followed, but neither of us spoke as we washed and prepared to return to our engagements.

As I was leaving the hospital the porter came up to me.

'I've been looking for you, sir.' he said. 'I've been asked to give you this.' He held out an envelope. 'The secretary says the coroner should have it, but it's addressed to you and he agrees you ought to have it first. It was found in the coat-pocket of the man who's just died . . . the suicide.'

I took it wonderingly. I stared at the address in a writing I did not recognize at all, except that it was obviously German. It did not seem right to open it before the porter, who was eaten with curiosity.

'Thanks,' I said. 'Tell the secretary I'll read it and let him have it back if I think it's important for the inquest. But I rather fancy it's a private note.'

I sat in the car and slit the envelope. There was a single sheet of paper inside, folded once. The signature was Wilhelm Züchen and the text was in German. No doubt he had not felt his English equal to the occasion.

'I have found out', it ran, 'that I am going to be interned. It seems that despite all our hopes we have no country and no cause. We were foolish to have hoped otherwise. I want to thank you, for my wife and myself, for all your generous help. Do not think badly of us for this. Ask yourself what else was there to do? We

might have gone to America, but we have travelled far enough. The Rhine is as far from here as it is from death. We were glad of your friendship, which we treasured, and we ask for blessings on you and also on all those who have been kind and helpful to us here. They were many. They will not condone this madness. It has been so sudden, so unexpected. But we could not bear separation. The mere idea of it is intolerable and the way we have chosen will keep us together. We die hoping those who have right on their side will win the war. What do our little lives matter when so many who are young and strong and happy will have to die and suffer before the world can be made clean and decent again.'

It was typical of the man, this note. It spoke, though unintentionally, of his trust and loyalty, his belief in the good things of life, his love and devotion for his wife. He wanted to see the world, as he put it, clean and decent again.

My friends told me it was war; that in war many have to suffer that the cause may be served, and that often injustice is done that good may come of it. Perhaps they are right, these my friends. It is wrong in war to let personal problems outweigh the larger one. The individual does not count in war. The soldier who in his own private life abhors rabbit shooting has to kill men. He does so, though he may not know it, because a greater force than his own, a cause more urgent than his, has taken control of him. The tragedy of war is that it stimulates at one and the same time the most noble and the most ignoble in man.

Chapter 15

Police in Harley Street

The tragedy of the Züchens seemed at first the climax and end of a business that did not please me. The detention of aliens abated. The Battle of Britain was beginning, and the skies were becoming gravid with the roar of aircraft engines. The country was facing up to its gravest danger and it turned away from panic measures. Terror was knocking at the door, and the main task was to drive it away, not to search the house for possible leaks in the roof. But actually, though in more subtle ways, the police comb for the Fifth Column was still being applied. No doubt these less spectacular methods were yielding a much richer harvest. The most dangerous agent is the one who is least obvious, the most commonplace. An Englishman with treachery in his heart could do far more damage than a hundred men and women whose alien status was proclaimed in every word they spoke. I was to be provided with a very convincing example of the way in which this painstaking probe was applied.

One day I came back late from the hospital. There were no appointments in my book, and as I entered my rooms in Harley Street my mind was far away. What I was thinking of I cannot say; I was just in an abstracted mood.

The receptionist intercepted me as I crossed the hall. 'There are two gentlemen to see you, sir,' she said in a tone that seemed to hold some hidden significance.

'Patients?' I asked. 'But this is unexpected. It is Wednesday and you know I try to make no appointments for Wednesdays.'

'No, sir, they're not patients.' She was determined to build up an air of mystery. I could see that. 'They came without an appointment and insisted on waiting.'

'Then who are they? I have paid my income tax and I'm not expecting the bailiffs. Who are they?'

'They're from Scotland Yard, sir . . . police.'

'Oh-ho!' I rubbed my hands. 'No doubt all my secret sins have been found out. Thank you for the warning. I'll go straight to my room, then you can bring them in.'

I was puzzled rather than perturbed. The police might come to see a doctor on all sorts of subjects. I have a great respect for the British police, especially the men from Scotland Yard. They do not disport themselves in fancy dress, and their appearance is often deceptively commonplace. But many of them have keen and lucid minds. I have seen them at work and marvelled at their thoroughness. I looked forward to this interview. But, then, I had a clear conscience. I could imagine people who, given fair warning, would have departed in the opposite direction with the utmost speed.

'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' I said as they were shown in. 'I see all sorts and conditions of men in this room, but I can't recall having the police here before. I want to thank you in advance for a new experience. What can I do for you? I am entirely at your service.'

I had read in detective books that it is always well to greet the police frankly and put yourself wholeheartedly at their disposal. Not that I imagined any sort of pose would deceive these two extremely keen-looking men. One, who introduced himself as Chief Inspector Price, was about fifty, with a hard yet humorous mouth and a large burly figure that suggested physical strength to go with the mental alertness. His companion, Sergeant James, was younger, thinner and more ascetic-looking. But he, too, had very bright inquisitive eyes that were obviously making a detailed inventory of the room. I decided that if I lost anything this would be the man to go to. He would clearly know more about the disposition of my things than myself.

'Thank you, sir,' said the inspector, whom I settled in my most comfortable chair. 'There are just a few questions we should like to ask you, if you don't mind. We shan't keep you long.'

'I repeat, I am at your service.'

Chief Inspector Price lay back in his chair and looked absently at the ceiling. He seemed the most friendly of men.

'You were concerned, sir,' he began, 'in the suicide case at the North-West Hospital . . . the affair of two people named Züchen.'

'Yes.' So that was it. The usual inquiries for the inquest.

'We have been informed that the deceased left a letter for you. It was not produced at the inquest. Now, sir, you will appreciate that was not quite the right thing to do. It may have been important, but I'm sure it wasn't as you didn't come forward with it. On the other hand, it is always better to let the police have a look at these things and make a decision on them.'

I acknowledged the reproof humbly. This man was clearly one who did not beat about the bush.

'Well, sir, I'd like to see that letter. Have you still got it?'

I had. It was in my desk and I produced it. The inspector read it, looked at the back of the sheet, held it up to the light, and then handed it back.

'There's no harm done there. I was sure there wouldn't be,' he said. 'Most of it was in the letter the man left for the coroner. He was very thoughtful and obviously liked to make a tidy job of anything he undertook. Now I notice that he says he's grateful to you for your help. What would that mean exactly?'

He withdrew his gaze from the ceiling and turned an exceedingly bright blue eye upon me.

'I was able to help him when he came to this country. I introduced him to the refugee organizations and was able to assist him in other ways.'

'Such as?'

'Signing forms for him and so on. You know the sort of thing, inspector.'

He nodded. 'You'd known him before, then?'

'I had known him some years ago when I was in Germany.'

'You spent some time in Germany?'

'I studied there and later held appointments at various hospitals. Altogether I was several years in Germany.'

'This Herr Züchen, now . . . what was your opinion of him?'

I told him. I gave a glowing account of him. The inspector nodded again sympathetically.

'This must have been a blow for you,' he said. 'Have you been to Germany since you took up residence in this country?'

'I was there only a few weeks before the war,' I answered.

His nod this time had quite a definite meaning. I had merely confirmed what he already knew.

'So I understand, sir. It seems a curious time to choose for a trip to Germany.'

'Why? There was no certainty of war. Did *you* know there was going to be a war?'

'No, sir, I did not. But the situation was strained. It would not have been nice to have been caught there. Most people were thinking of returning from Germany then . . . not going there. Why did you go?'

'I had my sister staying with me. For a long time we had promised

ourselves a trip to Germany so that I could show her all the places I knew and that had a special significance for me. It was a sentimental journey, inspector. I had the opportunity of sparing the time and took advantage of it.'

'I see. You had no other end in view?'

'None. It was pure pleasure.'

'Were you disappointed?'

'I think so. Sentimental journeys are always disappointing. Our power of self-delusion breaks down in the face of reality. And actually I had a rather unpleasant experience.'

Again there was that omniscient nod. If I had felt inclined to tell lies, it would have been a sufficient warning to me of their futility with this man. His air was bland, but he would not stand trifling, and I had a distinct impression that it would be unwise to challenge him to a battle of either wits or physical strength.

'The British consul helped you, I understand,' he said. 'You were detained by the SS, who were proposing to put forward a charge of offending against the currency exportation laws. You were three days, I believe, in their hands?'

'That is so.'

'And during that time you saw Commandant Leck frequently."

'I never learnt his name. The commandant interrogated me several times a day. He was a most persistent man.'

'And eventually the charges were dropped,' said the inspector. It was not in any way a question. 'You were released on condition that you left Munich at once. Why was that?'

I shook my head. 'I cannot tell you. The consul intervened, and no doubt the SS were satisfied that the whole thing was trumped up and could not be sustained, even in a German court.'

'But you were not arrested on a currency charge,' persisted the officer of the law. 'Actually you had been embroiled in some affair in a beer garden and insulted an SS agent.'

'Yes.'

'Doesn't it strike you as curious that they should have released you like that? They were very touchy about insults to their uniform.'

'I took it that the British consul had put things right, and they decided that three days in their cells was sufficient punishment.'

'Quite so, sir. Quite so. What did the commandant talk about?'

'He was trying to get me to admit offences I had not committed. It is a usual police procedure in some countries.'

'But not in this, sir, as you know. Not in this,' said Inspector Price heartily. He was so patently sincere that I believed him, and wondered what precisely he was getting at. He could not have looked more innocent if he had been guilty of the very practice I had named.

'You know nothing of Commandant Leck?' he resumed.

'Nothing beyond what I saw of him during those three unhappy days.'

'You didn't know he had spent several years in this country, had many friends here, and collected information from them?'

'Certainly I did not.'

He nodded vaguely. 'You have my sympathy for having spent time in Nazi cells,' he said unexpectedly. 'From Munich you went to Paris, and from there you travelled into Italy. Is that right?'

'It is.'

'You have friends in Italy?'

'A great many. I studied there also. I also know a great many people in France. I have travelled a good deal, you know, and I meet people everywhere. Some of them have a habit of becoming friends.'

'Quite so. It must be nice to have a touch of the cosmopolitan in you. For myself, I've never been further away than Dieppe.' He smiled. 'You had no special reason to look up these people . . . at that time.' He added the last words with an air of great significance. I was beginning to get the drift of all this.

'My sister and I wanted to escape from the war-talk that filled Paris. We were on holiday, you know. Unfortunately, it was worse in Italy than in France.'

'I see . . . yes, I see. Did you pay a visit to Signor Giovanni Materelli?'

'I did.'

'You know he is one of the leaders of the fascists?'

'I knew he had many political connections. He is a man of some importance in his country.'

'Did you talk politics with him?'

'I may have done . . . casually in the course of general conversation. It was difficult to keep politics out of conversation at that time. I have told you that is why we left Italy.'

'Yes, sir. I quite understand. But to return to Herr Züchen. We seemed to have wandered rather far from him. I must apologize. You were too interesting, sir. You know quite a number of refugees and aliens, I take it?'

'I see a lot of them in hospital. I speak several European languages and it is helpful in dealing with them.'

'It must be a great asset. Now, sir, I suppose you are particularly well in with the Russians living in London?'

'I have met great numbers of them,' I replied. 'Many of them are my patients.'

'Have you ever had anything to do with a lady named Alicia Linkova?'

I shook my head. 'The name is quite unfamiliar to me. What is she . . . a White Russian?'

'I believe so.'

'Then it is rather extraordinary I have not met her. I have attended most of the receptions held by the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol, the head of the White Russians in this country.'

'Well, I suppose you can't remember everybody. I expect you'll be hearing of her soon.' And the inspector smiled; it was a large luscious smile, the smile of a man who has a particularly good joke up his sleeve and does not want to offer it till it is fully ripe.

He asked many more questions. I had, it seemed, a quite extensive file in the archives of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard. Few of my movements and actions were unknown to them, and they took an intelligent interest in all. Facts I thought I had forgotten were brought to light and sampled by the inspector with the air of a connoisseur sipping some rare vintage from which the label had been lost. I was asked about my sister and her fascist friends, the ones who had been so amicably inclined to Hitler and his régime. Two or three of them had been detained under Regulation 18B, and my connections with them were carefully explored. Had I known at the time that they were fascists? If so, why had I spent so much time with them?

'I knew they held pro-fascist views,' I explained. 'Quite a lot of people did before the war, inspector; you must know that better than I do. Some people even suggested that the Government was more sympathetic to fascists than to anyone else, especially after Munich. If I spent a lot of time with these people, the answer is obvious. They were my sister's friends and she wanted me to accompany her.'

'Was your sister a fascist?'

'No. She had no particular views at all. She was more familiar with the affairs of rue de la Paix than those of the Quai d'Orsay.'

'I see. She was not detained with you in Munich?'

'No. That affair quite broke her of any leanings she might have had towards fascism. She thought it was brutal and silly after that.'

'Yet she went with you to Italy,' said the inspector softly.

It was quite obvious what he was driving at. I was in some way a suspect. All my actions had to be investigated. But in spite of the disillusion that had come to Herr Züchen, I still believed in the fairness of the police. The panic had passed. If these suspicions, whatever they were, had come up earlier I should have been whisked away and questioned afterwards. I was a little flattered by the care they were devoting to me. And I had to admit that the Chief Inspector was remarkably unbiased. He considered each one of my replies on its merits and had obviously formed no prejudiced opinions.

At last he finished. He rose with many apologies for having taken up so much of my time.

'I'm sure your time is very valuable, sir,' he said cheerily. 'There are not many doctors about now . . . Harley Street itself is covered with "To Let" boards. But that', he added with a chuckle, 'is because they've followed their rich victims to the country, I suppose.'

He did not give me a chance to reply. He grew suddenly official and business-like.

'I'm grateful to you, sir, for the way you have answered my questions without being inquisitive as to why I've been asking them. There is a reason, sir . . . depend on that. I've no time to waste on pleasant calls. And now I've a request to make. I'm going to ask you not to leave town for the next few days. We can't stop you if you want to, of course, but it's rather important. Can I rely on you, sir?'

'Certainly,' I replied. 'I consider myself under walking arrest.'

'Not as bad as that, sir. It's a thing we don't have in England. But it'll make things easier for all of us if you stay put. Thank you again, sir, you've been very helpful.'

He shook me warmly by the hand and departed. I glanced at my watch. It was three hours since I had entered that room. He had promised not to keep me long. His 'few questions' had amounted to dozens. But that did not matter. I was anxious about what it all meant. The more I thought about it the clearer it became. Someone must have been saying things about me, and built up a pretty good case, too, for I believed the inspector when he said that the police had no time to waste on pleasant chats. I thought of Marker and of Züchen. I did not like the prospects at all. All the same I relied on

my innocence. There might be circumstantial evidence against me, but I had done nothing of which to be ashamed.

For several days I heard nothing more. In the meantime, however, I learnt several things that rather weakened my faith in the inevitable triumph of justice. The police were taking no chances, and their powers were now so wide that they did not hesitate to detain suspects unless proof of their innocence was clear and convincing. I did my best to carry on with my work as though nothing had happened. But as each day passed without news I felt more certain that the blow must fall.

The receptionist smiled at me one afternoon when I came in after lunch. 'The gentlemen from Scotland Yard are here, sir,' she announced brightly.

'Thank you,' I said, wishing I could share her carefree interest in the work of the Special Branch. I asked that they be brought to my room immediately.

'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' I said when they entered. 'I am all ready for you. My case is packed. Am I allowed to get in touch with my lawyer before you take me away?'

To my surprise, Chief Inspector Price chuckled.

'Certainly, sir,' he said. 'You can communicate with the entire Law Society and the Bar Council as well so far as we are concerned. I am here', he went on more seriously, 'to offer you the Commissioner's apologies for the inconvenience you have been put to . . . and no doubt some anxiety.'

'Apologies?' I gasped. 'But . . . I don't quite understand.'

'Quite so,' he said, settling down into the same chair as he had occupied on the previous visit, though I had not invited him to, as I imagined an arrest would take only a few moments. 'It may seem strange to you after the grilling we gave you the other day. But you'll appreciate we can't take risks. We have to follow everything up. At the same time we're never ashamed to own up when we've made a mistake—and a mistake seems to have been made in your case. We were on the wrong track altogether. Properly led up the garden, as you might say. Still, it was cleverly done, and if it hadn't been for one stupid mistake the informer made . . . well, we might not be here now on such a pleasant errand. It's a pity we can't do anything more than offer our apologies, and I hope—everyone hopes—that you'll accept them and let bygones be bygones.'

'Certainly I accept your apologies, inspector,' I returned. 'Nothing pleases me better than to know all this business is over and done

with. But you've been very mysterious about it all. I think I know what you're driving at, though, of course, it's only a guess. Come now, inspector. You said you wished you could do something else besides offer apologies to make amends. Well then, set my mind and curiosity at rest by telling me as much as you can of this affair. I'm not asking you to give away official secrets . . . don't think that. But I think I have a right to know why I was suspected; otherwise I might jump to wrong conclusions, you know.'

He looked at me with a twinkling eye. 'I'm not sure that it is in order, but I can't see any harm could be done. After all, we came here and wasted your time. . . .'

'Three hours of it,' I murmured.

'As much as that? Really I'd no idea! It just shows how time flies,' he said innocently, as though he hadn't entered in his notebook the exact time at which I had first greeted him and the exact time he had risen to go. I knew as much as that of police methods. 'We've covered a lot of ground, though, and it was as well you were so frank. You're the ideal witness, sir. I wish all witnesses were the same . . . truthful, not imagining things, and not at all suggestible. You'd be surprised the trouble we have with some of them. They snatch at anything. Make a hint at something, and a couple of minutes later it comes back to you as a first-hand, eye-witness experience. Makes things very difficult.'

'It must do,' I answered. I was not at all interested then in the difficulties of the worthy inspector's work or the vagaries of the witnesses he interrogated with so much suavity and acumen. I wanted my own case settled up. And I had not three hours to spare that afternoon. 'But about my own case,' I continued. 'You were about to say . . .?'

He gave a shrewd look and chuckled. 'Not being put off, are you, sir?' he said. 'Well, it all started with a letter—anonymous, of course. It denounced you fair and square, and it went into so much detail that it couldn't be ignored. We get hundreds of those letters, sir, and I hate them . . . just hate them! If a man's got an accusation to make and he believes it, why can't he come out into the open with it? We won't eat him if he's made a genuine mistake. But in these days we have to leave nothing to chance. Everyone is looked into.'

' "Information received",' I murmured.

'That's it, sir. Some of them are obvious fakes and others are sent out of sheer spite. But the one about you . . . that was a good piece of work. Of course, we could easily check up on some things. There

was that little affair with the SS. The consular records soon showed that wasn't a bit of imagination. And the trip to Italy . . . that, too, was O.K. But it was the SS business that made us sit up. You see, we knew quite a lot about Commandant Leck, and we'd already put a few of his friends into a place where they won't cause any trouble while the war is on. One or two of them had been arrested in Germany, just like you had, and we found out it was only a blind so that he could talk to them without arousing suspicion. Against that in your case was the fact that there'd been a definite bit of bother. I don't think Leck ever encouraged his friends to knock his boys about to give the business an air of reality. No, sir. That was in your favour.'

'Thank you, inspector. My only regret is that I didn't knock that brute about. I've never wanted to kick a backside so much in all my life.'

'I doubt whether you'd have got away with that. They're too hot on their honour and all that. Then, of course,' he went on, 'there's your connection with all these aliens. They're our worst headache. Some of 'em are obviously genuine, and they've all my sympathy. Others are no less obviously wrong 'uns. The worst are those who look innocent enough but aren't, and they're the cause of all the trouble. When that man Züchen committed suicide we'd already got our eye on you, and it didn't improve things. You see, sir, we policemen are always suspicious of a man who prefers to kill himself to being interrogated. It creates a bad impression. We want to know why, and what he had to hide. We have to take that attitude, sir, you understand.' He added the last words apologetically.

'You certainly had something to go on,' I remarked. 'It must have looked a nice case to you. I suppose you thought I was taking advantage of my position to do a bit of spying and so on?'

'Not exactly, but that was suggested.' He looked a little unhappy at my bluntness. 'When Italy came into the war your Italian connections, of course, didn't help. You must admit it was a pretty strong *prima facie* case.'

'I admit it at once, inspector. I'd be the last to argue with you. I wouldn't expect you to tell me what to do in my work and I wouldn't presume to criticize you in your job. But you mentioned something about a mistake. What was it?'

'Ah!' The inspector leant back in the chair and smiled happily. 'You remember I mentioned Alicia Linkova to you?'

'Yes,' I nodded.

'It was lucky for you that you didn't know her.' He chuckled. 'We took special care to check that up, and we couldn't get a line anywhere . . . not a line.'

'But . . .?' I still did not see the point.

'Now, sir, you promised you wouldn't press me for official secrets. You'll hear all about the good lady in due course—I promise you that. By the way,' he went on, rising, 'there's a question I'd like to ask you if I may.'

'Carry on, inspector.'

'Have you any idea who wrote that letter?'

I shook my head. I knew I had enemies, but there was none whom I could suspect of that. One or two might, and it is impossible to tell how the most sane of people will behave when suffering from war hysteria.

'No,' I said, 'I can't help you. Would you take action if you knew?'

'It's a safe rule, sir, that anonymous letter writers accuse their victims of the very things they'd like to do themselves if they had the chance,' he said sagely. 'And now, sir, it must be good-bye. You've been very nice to us and I'd like to thank you for your courtesy. You've been patient—which is more than I can say of a lot of people I have to interview.'

'I'm glad it's turned out as it has,' I said cordially, shaking him warmly by the hand. 'Don't think any more about it. I was rather hurt, I'll admit, when I saw the way the wind was blowing. I think you can understand that, though I can see it was rather foolish of me.'

'Of course it was,' he replied cordially. 'I can assure you everything will be forgotten . . . so far as a policeman can forget.' He smiled broadly. 'And as the beak says when he dismisses someone who's been too clever for us, there isn't a stain on your character. And, of course, there's no official record of our interview. It was entirely precautionary, and I couldn't have used a word of it in court, if the need had arisen, because I hadn't warned you. So there you are, sir. Goodwill all round, I hope, and no bad feeling.'

'Exactly, inspector. You handled the whole thing with great tact.'

We parted exchanging courtesies and compliments wholesale. The sergeant never said a word. He just smiled or nodded slowly from time to time in agreement with what his superior said. But I am convinced there wasn't a thing passed him by. He could have told the number of buttons there were on my waistcoat, the titles of the books on my shelves, and the number of letters lying on my desk. As

I shook hands with him I felt that if I met him twenty years hence he would recognize me at once and recall every detail of our interview.

That evening as I dined I thought the whole thing over. I had had a lucky escape. It was clear someone had his knife in me, though who it was I never discovered. But I did not realize how close a shave it had been till a few weeks later, when the newspapers were filled with reports of the sentence, after a secret trial, of Alicia Linkova. That woman had been one of the cleverest spies in England. If I had admitted knowing her, or denied having known her when I had in fact met her (which would have been worse), the shrewd inspector would certainly not have been so affable on his second visit. On the contrary, I imagine his second interrogation—no doubt preceded by the warning to which he had referred—would have been much more gruelling, and I should later have added experience of an English remand prison to my store of memories.

All this was only a passing phase. The threat to Britain was growing closer and people were turning from spy-hunting and alien-baiting to grimmer things. They were only expressions of an anxious and rather bored people, a people wakened from a long period of complacency and not knowing quite in which direction to turn its desire for action. England was on the eve of the blitz—the blitz that was to wound and scar her but also rediscover for her her immortal soul.

Chapter 16

Blitz

Dunkirk acted like a chemical catalyst on the nation. All the ingredients were there for the terrific effort that would alone win the war, but they would not combine properly. They needed something to start off the reaction. And Dunkirk provided it. The nation became, in Churchill's historic phrase, grim and gay. Its people worked as they had never worked before. They faced a future blacker than ever with a lighter heart and a determination that so far the war had not produced. Any moment might bring forth the news of an invasion. In the mood that followed Dunkirk the defenders of Britain, men, women and children, were ready to defend as heroically and steadfastly, without thought of surrender, as later the defenders of Stalingrad were to do.

But it was the blitz that put the finishing touches to this great transformation of a nation's soul. The people faced the enemy unflinchingly. They accepted the challenge and they beat it off. For all the brilliant exploits of Fighter Command, of the anti-aircraft gunners who fought with too few weapons, and the untiring labours of the Civil Defence workers, would have availed nothing if the spirit of the people had not remained firm and true. When Hitler launched his Luftwaffe on Great Britain he made his first and probably his fatal mistake.

Parts of the East End were reduced to a shambles. The Government's policy in regard to shelters was seen to be almost criminally inadequate and the tube stations were at last opened to provide protection for the people from the rain of death from above. The night sky became lit with fires, and the drone of aero-engines became the nightly accompaniment to periods of twelve or more hours spent in any place but bed.

It was curious how the blitz became almost a normal part of life. Blackout came, and the curtains had scarcely been drawn before the sirens wailed their message. Then came that relentless beat of noise from above, the occasional crunch of a bomb, and later the sharp bark of anti-aircraft fire. On the few nights when this was not the procedure one felt a sense of unfamiliarity.

And the bombings themselves gradually passed from something reported in the papers to everyday experience. Soon there were few districts that had not had their baptism of fire and death. Familiar street corners melted into amorphous heaps of rubble. The names of well-known people were whispered about as being among the dead. Many of them were but so, too, were a greater number of ordinary people—men and women who had come home from a hard day's work cheerfully ready to face the discomforts of a night in an Anderson shelter or a damp basement before dawn should bring the beginning of another day of toil. They died, these unnamed victims, not shuddering with terror but in surprise that the accustomed routine of life had been destroyed.

In the sky there was no arbiter to decide who should die and who should live to face another night of death. The night shed its cargoes of carnage, and the starlight looked down coldly and inhumanly on the shattered homes of the poor and the wrecked mansions of the rich. But never did the brave heart of London miss a beat. The buses still ran, though many of them took unfamiliar routes and gave a sense of adventure to an oft-made journey; and many of the buses themselves were strange, brave reinforcements from Glasgow and Birmingham, Southampton and Manchester, that had come up to London to hold the line and replace the casualties. In the day people still came to stare in shop-windows and buy, not merely necessities for the day but things for to-morrow. In that was the perfect answer to Hitler's blitz.

It is a tale that has been told, but memory brings forward ever some new facet of it. One remembers moments of macabre beauty: the silhouette of some shattered church against a bare skyline that only a day before had been huddled with ugly back-to-back houses; the bright orange glow of flames as the fire-bombs took hold and threw into relief the still unbroken majesty of St. Paul's. One thinks of the brave gesture of a tree, standing with its leaves and branches torn off, but its trunk still sound, amid a heap of rubble. One recalls that strange elation of release and hope as the 'raiders passed' siren faded up into the still, grey light of dawn. One remembers with a reverent gratitude the unrecorded devotion of the rescue parties who fought stones with their bare hands and held up collapsing masonry with their shoulders that some trapped man or woman might still have chance of life—new Atlases who supported a world of hope and humanity; the firemen who played their hoses while the bombs still avalanched about them; the first-aid men who gave the surgeon

a chance later by their prompt and efficient work, and the women of the ambulance service who drove their cars unflinchingly no matter what was coming down.

All these things have faded into the grey limbo of memory. Like all war experiences they have already taken on the shape of the unreal. They may come again, but they will not be the same. A greater terror may be launched from the skies. But there cannot be a greater or a bolder reply. London, Coventry, Birmingham, Southampton, Bristol, Plymouth, these and many other towns: their names will not figure on the standards of any regiment as battle honours, but they will be inscribed for ever on the beating heart of a nation and a people, more treasured than the crosses of bronze and silver that sparkle on the breasts of heroes, more enduring than the fame of commanders and captains.

For then there was not simply terror: the great suffering was the birth pang of something new. With the sudden death came the sudden friendship, the sudden trust, the sudden love—above all, the sudden understanding, the sudden unity, the sudden purpose. Not perhaps in the hearts of the leaders was a new world being brought to life. The hearts of the old are sinewy and set in old ways; they beat only by the grace of young blood that is being poured out. The ancient moloch of tradition survives only by sacrifice. There was one casualty in that time that was mentioned in no lists, that was regretted by none. It was War. The makers of War were slain in the hearts of the people, and the fires of the burning homes and factories forged a resolution in the soul of the people that this time sacrifice and suffering, the loss of youth and happiness, should not be in vain.

I saw the blitz chiefly from the inside of a hospital. I came upon its effects chiefly in the grey light of morning when London seemed to be mending her ravaged charm like an indolent lady with a powder puff, shaking the dust and débris from her hair, and preparing to settle down to work. The night was often a fever of work.

The ambulances came, driven through the hell outside by no-one knows what miracle of bravery. Those shattered forms came straight to the table. It was hard work, but no-one grumbled, no-one thought of relaxing. It was Hitler's aim to kill; it was our aim to save. It brought a strange feeling of happiness and purpose, as though for the first time purpose in life had been realized and the ends of destiny fulfilled.

There were times when the hospital building shook with the impact of bombs, but somehow one did not notice. The 'All Clear'

was more often than not merely a remote incident, the subject of a chance remark. For ten, twelve or even more operations had to be performed. Ten, twelve or more lives had to be snatched somehow from the gaping, greedy jaws of this death that barbarism had let loose.

'Send them back alive!' That was the slogan, the thought, that animated us. Hospitals were bombed, but the work went on. In the entire Emergency Medical Service of London there was not one resignation.

The toll of casualties mounted higher and higher. Every night brought some new problem; and after the night came the day with its commonplace tasks. Much of it was work with which one could not be satisfied: stitching and patching emergency work. Life had to be saved quickly so that one could pass on to the next case. It was not an occasion for subtlety or finish. Tailor's work—second-hand tailor's work at that.

The moment arrived when I rejoiced that I had given so much time to the study of plastic surgery. Now I was coming into my own! For if during the nights I had to patch and contrive, cobble and sew, during the day I could set to work to repair the ravages that the bombs had caused. It meant restorations and skin grafting, bone replacement and fine corrections. This time there would be little or no need for those ghastly mortuaries of the living where the disfigured and the shattered had lived since 1918, screened from the public gaze because they were too devastating an evidence of the horror of war. The surgeon could claim that he was not content to send them back alive; he could send them back to their friends and their lovers, their wives and their children, as they were, with the disfigurement only in their minds that time, the great healer, would efface.

Not all the cases I had then were from the civil population. There was a Royal Air Force pilot who came to me for correction to his nose. He wore the ribbons of the D.S.O. and the D.F.C. on his breast. He had battled bravely against enormous odds in the Battle of Britain. He was prepared to challenge any number of Messerschmitts. But his nose was inordinately long, and he went in fear of the remarks that plain-spoken colleagues made about it. What was a joke to them was a torture to him.

It was not a very difficult correction. I had done many before, but this case was exceptional in one respect. No bandage was really necessary, because the operation was done chiefly from within the nose. This young man, however, insisted that he should be strapped up till where his nose had been was now a pile that looked like the washing bundle for a fair-sized family. At first I did not see the need

for this precaution. I argued with him. I was even a little annoyed that he should presume to tell me what should be done. After all, I had not tried to tell him how to make a belly-landing in a Spitfire.

The more I protested the firmer he became. And he was a very determined young man and I almost felt sorry for the pilot of a Messerschmitt who had the bad luck to cross his sight. At last when, weary of the encounter, I weakly agreed to do as he bid and began to salve my conscience by invoking the principle of humouring the patient, he vouchsafed an explanation.

'Can't you see', he said rather shyly, 'that the mess would think me a pansy if I admitted I'd had my nose straightened? With this on I can write it off as an accident, and no-one can be responsible for what you surgeon blokes will do to a chap when you get him on the table.'

I saw his point. But he need not have worried. I could think of the gratitude that was given me for the little skill I had when I restored a casualty to his people with little more than a slight scar to show for it.

Before the war plastic surgery was still rather despised in this country, despite the fact that a British surgeon, Gillies, had done so much for it. It was looked upon as some sort of offshoot of the beauty parlour, where glycerine and cold cream are sold under fancy names at a guinea the one-ounce jar. But to-day the attitude is already changing. Plastic surgeons are in the front line in the fight against the terrorism of the Nazis.

My hospital had not been bombed. It was a little way out of the centre, and there were some who thought this conferred on it a sort of immunity. There were still people who did not believe that the Luftwaffe regarded a hospital as an eligible target and looked upon the many hospital bombings as a mere caprice of chance. I thought otherwise; and I worked hard to make sure that the ordinary patients should be removed from the danger spots. There was one wing in particular I distrusted. I cannot say why. It looked rather unsafe and seemed to me more obvious from the air. When I succeeded in getting my point and having the wing cleared, I was derided as an overcautious old fogey not prepared to take risks that other people were coming to regard as normal.

I did not mind. It set my anxieties at rest, and anything was worth while then, when one snatched what sleep one could at any hour of the day and night. There were patients to see during the day and operations to perform. But they did not make a ceaseless stream, and precious moments of rest could be snatched between appointments. Some nights the Luftwaffe concentrated its attention else-

where: on the south side of the river perhaps or further to the east. Then one had only to stand by, and enjoyed the luxury of a night in bed, although in one's clothes, expecting to be awakened at any moment by the emergency alarm.

Late one afternoon I received an emergency call to visit a patient at the other end of London. I had operated two days earlier and now it was reported he had taken a turn for the worse. In my car I made my way across the town as quickly as I could. Luckily the call was not entirely necessary. No danger had arisen, and a less cautious medical attendant would not have summoned me. But I was glad of the call in a way, though it had put me to considerable inconvenience. I realized my patient was in very good hands.

The sirens had already wailed as I threaded my way back, more cautiously than I had set out, through the blacked-out streets. There was little traffic, but that was no encouragement to speeding. Here were lines of ambulances drawn up ready for the night's work. A mobile medical unit was parked in the middle of the road. Outside a depot were the tenders and trucks of the Rescue Squad. All were standing by, waiting for the call—the call that would send them into instant action with the grim efficiency that comes of practice. All these were obstacles. And there were the shielded red lights that ringed the craters or stood grouped round the red boards that warned passers-by of the presence of unexploded bombs. Night driving was a hazard in the blackout then, not taking into account the risk that at any moment death might deluge from the skies.

I do not know if there were planes overhead. I was moving along discreetly at first, and the drone of my own car drowned any external noise. I was tired, and I suppose the dull continuous hum had blunted my senses.

Approaching my hospital there is a fairly stiff hill, and the best way to negotiate it is to take it by storm. As I drew near my foot came down on the accelerator. I felt relieved. I was on the last stage of the last lap. Everything seemed peaceful.

Then came the howl. It was the howl that everyone in London and the other blitzed cities has heard, the howl with which all of us have become familiar. But no two people describe it alike. To one it is the swish of a gigantic curtain of silk being savagely rent aside. To another it is the awe-inspiring rush that an express train makes as it leaps at top speed from a tunnel. To yet another it is a whistle pure and simple. To me it was then, as it has always been, the howl of a demon. It always sends a shiver through me. People say

you do not hear it if it is coming at you, but that is denied by others. So far, I have not had enough experience to decide.

I do know that on that fateful night I heard the howl and almost immediately, it seemed to me, a bright green and yellow flash lit up the neighbourhood. If there was the sound of an actual explosion I did not register it. What I heard was the rumbling crash of masonry and a hail of débris on the roof of my car. Glass fell like a shower of enchanted snow. My headlights, screened though they were, flashed on it and made it glisten. How often in this war have I been impressed by this sudden emergence of beauty amid disaster! My car slid and slithered, so that I thought it was going to overturn. But I guessed what had happened. The road was a highway of glass; its sharp fragments broke noisily under my tyres.

Even then I did not think that the hospital itself had been hit. The confusion seemed to have come from quite another direction. Civil Defence workers tell me it is the most difficult thing in the world to locate by sound what they call, with typical British meiosis, an 'incident'. But it was near at hand, wherever it was. That was quite obvious. And my first thought was to get to the hospital—to be ready for the stream of casualties that would flow in, to take my place among the team that would try to reclaim the pathetic human wreckage.

It was one of the worst journeys I have ever made. I seemed to be wading in a tide of bricks and mortar. My feet grated on broken glass and tore at my shoes. It seemed it would never end. And it must, in fact, have taken some little time, for when I came to the hospital gates, a warden in a white helmet was already setting up a couple of lamps with blue glass, marking the post where the Incident Officer would take charge of the proceedings.

I stood for a moment in dismay and looked hard at the warden.

'Bad?' I asked.

'Fair,' he replied laconically.

At that moment the flames leapt up. I was appalled. The whole of the right wing of the hospital was down, a crazy, shapeless mass of rubble, round which flocked pinpoints of light as though fireflies were dancing there. 'Fair,' the warden had said; and again I wondered at the British taste for ridiculous understatement. But for one thing I was glad. This was the wing I had cleared. If that bomb had fallen two days earlier there would have been tens of casualties.

The civil defence squads were going into action already. The hospital A.R.P. staff had been reinforced by men from outside. A.F.S. men were already unrolling their hoses and getting into

position. Above the crackling of the flames—to my mind one of the most terrifying of all sounds—came the ominous roar of an aeroplane engine. I held my breath. How many more were coming? That fire would be a good target. German tactics were already advanced. Into flames such as these they hurled more high explosives and sometimes oil bombs.

It was impossible to get within ten yards of the blaze, and I stood fascinated by the sight. The whole massive structure had collapsed, as though it had been a cinema-set designed for the purpose. Great timber beams flamed like matches. The most dismally impressive sight of all were glimpses of hospital beds slowly turning over and discharging their loads of smouldering linen, which floated to the earth like ghosts.

A messenger came up to me.

'Ah, here you are, Mr. Sava,' he panted. 'We wondered what had happened to you. No-one knew whether you'd arrived or not. All the casualties have been assembled down the road. Most of them are theatre cases. That's what I've been asked to report.'

'Is the theatre still standing?' I asked. It was in the far wing.

'Mr. Cozens says it is usable,' he replied.

I followed him. The patients were being brought into the casualty ward, and I glanced at them. The worst cases would be for Cozens and myself. The others would be handled by the junior staff.

The first I examined was one of the most pathetic. Externally she seemed not to bear a single bruise, but the signs of internal hæmorrhage were plain. Plain to a doctor, at any rate, though an uninformed person might have passed her by. She was, I should judge, barely eighteen, a pleasant-looking girl on whom the icy hand of death was already extended.

'Have this case prepared,' I ordered to my assistant. 'I'll be along in a moment.'

I glanced at the others. Some were in a very bad state, and I wished I could have been in a dozen places at once; for speed is essential in most of these cases. An immediate operation may be comparatively easy. If it is delayed, even the chance of life itself may be lost. The most responsible decision one has to make is to decide which to treat first. A false judgement then may mean the loss of a life that could have been saved.

There are some cases which are obviously hopeless. If they were single accidents one might operate as an outside chance. But under blitz conditions one has to make the decision to leave them alone

and not deny the better chances to half a dozen others. For the hopeless cases there is only the comforting anodyne of morphine; the most one can do is to ensure that they die painlessly. . . . It is a hard and terrible decision, and one is often tortured afterwards by doubt. It is one of the most appalling prices one has to pay for war.

Overhead the plane still droned menacingly, but it no longer belonged to my world. If it dropped its bombs now, it was no concern of mine. In all probability I should not know anything about it. There was not much left of the hospital to hit, and I should be in that part. . . .

But, I repeat, it did not belong to my world. I was back again in the thick of a familiar scene . . . stitching and patching. Aiming first and foremost at saving life, and trying to do so in a manner that full repair could be made later. Battling with death. Battling with time. Battling with weariness that clouded one eyes and made one's hands feel like lead when they should be as feathers.

There were ten cases that night. I did not see dawn; it was just after ten o'clock when I left the theatre. I was tired and listless. I did not care what happened. But I could console myself that we had done a good job. We had fought our battles and won most of them.

I looked round the hospital. This had been a wonderful escape. The main block was still standing, though its windows gaped empty to the sky. But already the emergency repair men were at work. The sounds of hammering echoed and re-echoed as they tacked on their pieces of sisalkraft and board that would keep out the cold wind and shut out, too, the healing light. . . .

It had been an 'incident'. The absurd casualness of that word impressed itself again on my consciousness. But, I asked myself, an incident in what? Was it an incident in a war, an incident in an air-raid, or an incident in a lifetime?

Then I realized why the word had become so accepted. It was, after all, only an incident. The world—the world of London—was putting itself to rights again, taking up the threads of its work and pleasure, its marketing and business. One more hospital had been bombed. But it could still carry on. London could carry on. London was carrying on. As I looked out of the bare, empty frame that once had been my window, I saw an army lorry go by. It was a tanker carrying water to some area where the mains had been broken. One more incident. But only an incident. An incident in the great and glorious resistance of a people to a fury that one day they would finally subdue.

Chapter 17

Russian Interlude

The blitz was over. Spring came to London and to a dozen other cities not so much as the herald of a new season but rather as dawn after an overlong night of vigil. For the first time since early autumn thousands of people spent an undisturbed rest in a proper bed and wearing proper sleeping clothes. The crowded shelters, which had developed into community centres of their own, with entertainments, clubs, canteens, and all the paraphernalia of organized life, gradually emptied. Nightfall was no longer the gateway to trial and terror. It resumed its old place as the precursor of peace. Now and again the sirens sounded, but they were like the unhappy echo of something that was past.

Little by little the stark horror of those months slipped into the background of the mind, and one recalled readily only the gay moments, the ludicrous happenings. One began to realize why plays like *Journey's End* and books like *All Quiet* had had so great an impact on the minds of their time. Their authors had managed to shake off the nostalgia of war and recalled it as it really was, with all its purposeless beastliness, its denial of hope, its abnegation of every decency. That is not how people remember wars. Their minds are kind to them. They thrust the bad parts, the parts that should be in the forefront of every statesman's consciousness, down into the dark depths of the unconscious memory. Therein lies the danger of future wars. It explains why men could still talk sincerely of the glory of it all after Passchendaele and the Somme. The high lights remained, the little humanities of comradeship, while the dark shadows of filth sunk out of sight.

It was spring again. That was the main thing. For the present, time could be left to heal deep wounds. Spring was the period of hope. But it was hope tempered by apprehension. Would the long-threatened invasion now come? Where would Hitler turn next? The months marched on, and nothing seemed to happen—nothing, that is to say, as spectacular as the invasion of Norway or the crushing defeat of France. There were affairs here and there. For the moment, however, the great German war machine appeared to be

still under adjustment for the next great attack. There had been débâcle in Crete—'an island', an official commentator had said, 'can never be successfully invaded and held by air attack alone.' How bitterly the words echoed! The gains in the Western Desert had been surrendered. But everyone expected that something big was in the wind. Germany was massing—where? Rumour said on the shores of France. Rumours said on the frontiers of Russia. Rumour said in the Balkans for an attack on Turkey and the Middle East. Rumour spoke with a hundred tongues.

But principally the talk turned on Russia. The Russian Armies were certainly being gathered together. Speculation was rife. Was Stalin going to do the unexpected and carry the Russo-German pact still further? Was he going to add the might of Russia to the might of Germany? There was some sort of conciliation going on between Russia and Japan. Incidents on the Manchurian frontier grew less and less, and there was an obvious tendency to play them down in both the Russian and the Japanese Press.

It was about this time that the Grand Duchess Natalia Ivanovna first came to me for advice. Our social contacts were frequent, but this was the first occasion on which she had come to me in the capacity of a patient seeking a consultative opinion. I devoted great care to her examination and elucidating what it revealed. As a result of this my friendship with the family revived, and I came closer to them than I had been for some little time.

But it was closer only in the sense that I saw more of them as a family friend, visiting whenever I cared, without ceremony or invitation. The more I saw of the Grand Duke, the more I was conscious of the great gulf that had opened between his ideas and mine. He was still clinging to a vision of the old Russia, a Russia whose future was bound up with the restoration of the Romanovs and the reinstatement of the autocracy and the Church. I, on the other hand, though no communist, felt more friendly toward the new country that was taking shape on the eastern borders of Europe. I did not agree with those who shouted so loudly that Russian Communism, as interpreted by Lenin and Stalin, was the prototype of all future government. But I did see that on balance the new régime had helped and raised the common people of Russia from the depths into which Tsarism had thrust them.

Of course, with the Grand Duke the conversation always came back to Russia sooner or later. I had many arguments with him, but they were arguments without point. Nothing would budge him

from the view that the Soviets were wholly evil. If he could no longer see in Hitler the answer to the prayers of himself and his White Russian colleagues, he was not prepared to seek a compromise with the Soviets.

'How can you say they have done good?' he asked me, in the course of one of these discussions. 'Everywhere they went they strewed ruin and despair. Think of the loss they have caused to me and my friends alone. Think of the people who have died before their rifles.'

'I admit they have caused suffering and disaster, but no revolution is accomplished without it . . . a lot of it unnecessary and undeserved. But remember also, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I said, arguing for the sake of arguing, 'that Russia has always been a land in which violence has gone side by side with gentleness, and arrogance with humility. I do not say there were not good things in the old Russia —there were many, and I am no less sorry than you that they were swept away. But slowly the good things are returning. Under Stalin, a lot of the typically Russian features of life have been reinstated. Let us hope he can keep out the bad things that went with them.'

'If that is so', said Ivan Pavlovitch scornfully, 'my case is as good as made. There was never any need for the revolution. If these things, whatever they are, are coming back then they need never have been swept away.'

'It is not as simple as that. Those in power wanted to maintain the good things of Russian life, but equally they wanted to retain the bad—for many of them themselves were precisely those bad things: the influence of privilege, the doctrine of a divinely appointed ruling caste. The young revolution swept them all away in its wrath. You can think of the new Russia as a son that has been unnaturally suppressed by a stern and over-cruel father. When he comes of age he revolts against all that his father has stood for, and sets up his own ideas. But after a little while, when age and balance come to him, he realizes there was some good in the old man after all, and he decides he may as well admit as much. It is a sign of strength, not of weakness.'

It was only afterwards when I recalled the conversation that I saw the unconscious Freudianism of my contention. It put the whole psychoanalytical theory of revolution in a nutshell. But that would not have carried any weight with the Grand Duke, so there would have been no point in realising it at the time. He might be ready to believe in Father Pyotr's miracles, as I was to learn and as I have

elsewhere related, but he dismissed Freud and all his school as charlatans and quacks who practised some esoteric form of black magic. Did not Freud strike at the root of all religion? How could Russia survive without the guiding sustaining hand of the Orthodox Church?

Unfortunately the Grand Duke was not alone in considering that he and his fellows represented the true Russia. In the earlier part of the war Ivan Pavlovitch established some sort of connection with a Government department, acting as its adviser on Russian affairs. I was astounded when Natalia Ivanovna told me. It seemed incredible that the British Government could have been deceived by his pretensions. But I comforted myself with the thought that they had no doubt younger and abler men better informed on contemporary Russia, the Russia not of the Tsars but of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

The Grand Duke, however, felt that the Government was not making enough use of the services of his friends.

'I cannot understand it,' he remarked to me on one occasion. 'There are men in this country who have known Russia for the past fifty years and stood in the most influential circles there. They know Britain equally well. Surely their talent is being wasted?'

'The Russia of twenty years ago is dead,' I answered. 'Modern Russia is a land of youth. I hear that the Red Army has generals little more than thirty years of age. . . .'

He interrupted me with a tone of contempt. 'I am glad to hear it. It means that when the time comes their Army will collapse. If they are involved in war with either Germany or the Allies, they simply won't stand a chance. You can't fight this war without experience . . . first hand experience . . . of the last one. You can take my word for that.'

'I am sorry, Ivan Pavlovitch,' I said. 'The exact opposite seems to be true. France fell because she thought this war was going to be the last all over again. She prepared her Maginot Line to fight off the attacking forces of the last war. Where are France and the French Army now? Germany has conquered the Continent by her new and surprising methods. Some of those she copied from the Soviet—the ideas of these very generals you despise. Parachute troops, for example, and the use of towed gliders. We had the chance of copying the ideas, but we failed to see the possibilities because we were still thinking of trenches and barbed wire. The young German

generals did see the possibilities, and they have taken Norway and Crete, despite the British Navy.'

'The Russians may have ideas . . . it is part of the Russian temperament to have ideas. But they cannot work them out. Certainly not under the Soviet. They banished all the culture and learning of the old Russia, the real Russia. . . .'

'No, Ivan Pavlovitch. That is not true. Maxim Gorki wrote while the Tsar was on the throne and attained fame. He became the supreme writer of the Soviet Union. The Soviets did not disturb the work of Pavlov and his institute, though Pavlov was by no means friendly toward the new Government. It was only those who refused to work with the Soviet who took away their gifts, whatever they were.'

'Those who refused were the true Russians, the ones who would not bow the knee to the interlopers. . . .'

So the argument would go on, neither side getting anywhere.

Unfortunately the Grand Duke's friends seemed to be the advisers to a good many people who wrote or spoke on Russian affairs. When Russia came into the war, the victim of Hitler's treacherous attack, the opinions I had so often heard in the Wlastopols' drawing-room were repeated in print and on the platform, and even at the microphone.

I heard Churchill's speech that memorable Sunday evening. He called Russia 'Ally'; he pledged the whole support of the British Empire to the latest target of German aggression. I thought it one of the most courageous things even that courageous fighter has done in his career. He faced the world and told the truth as he saw it. He ignored the risks that would have deterred a lesser man. There were plenty to call him turncoat and renegade, to accuse him of glib opportunism, of insincerity. He ignored them all. He saw that the war was one in which personal differences should be set aside, and he carried the people with him. But there were still those who distrusted Russia—as Russia, with some cause, still distrusted us—and they did not hide their point of view.

These critics gave the Red Army six weeks of resistance. After that there would be collapse, a débâcle beside which the fall of France would be only a minor affair. Hitler knew what he was doing, these propagandists alleged. He wanted Russian wheat, Russian oil, Russian industry. He would get them—and according to his own timetable. But they could not be wholly pro-Hitler. They avowed that in the struggle Hitler's Army would undergo immense

losses and be irreparably weakened. That would be our chance. With a few divisions we could march into Germany and dictate the peace we wanted.

It was all so simple. The Utopia of privilege was going to be easy of attainment. The Grand Duke was inclined to accept this opinion. Already he saw himself reinstated, advising whoever should be selected to mount the Romanovs' throne. Perhaps it was the last flickering hope to animate a cause that, already moribund, became indubitably dead the moment Churchill made his speech.

History has shown how those hopes were falsified. The Russian armies did not break. The morale of the people withstood suffering and atrocity. Guerillas showed how a nation at one with itself could deal with a ruthless invader. Moscow did not fall.

In those early days of the Russian campaign the Grand Duke did not disguise his hopes of a Bolshevik defeat, provided it could be gained at the price of a concurrent defeat of Germany. It was only later that he began to see the truth and understand that if Russian resistance failed the war would be as good as lost. In the end he showed himself a truer Russian than ever he had claimed to be. He began to put the good of his native land above the interests of his own class. I even met him at a reception given at the Russian Embassy, a reception at which many of the old opponents of the Bolshevik found themselves the guests of the Soviet Ambassador.

I think that many of the arguments I had with him after Father Pyotr had intervened in my case were embittered. He professed to see in me a renegade, a man Russian born who had deserted everything of his native inheritance. I had denied the power of the Church and its miracles. I was prepared to speak slightingly of the Tsar and all that monarch had upheld. I had not even the excuse of ignorance of Russian conditions, which an Englishman holding the same views might advance.

Father Pyotr, of course, was even more anti-Bolshevik than the Grand Duke. He saw in the onrushing German armies the avenging hand of God. The Germans were devils, steeped in every infamy. They had been chosen by the Almighty to enter a death-grapple with their fellow devils. Both would perish together. A new Tsar would sit in Moscow. He would revive the glories of the Church and the State. The last phase of the apocalyptic punishment of the Russian people for abandoning their God-sent rulers—the Church and the Tsar—was being worked out.

I did not argue much with Father Pyotr. He prophesied many

things, not least that Moscow would fall. But I do not think these soothsayings were *ex cathedra*. He never claimed them to be inspirations from God, though I often tried to drive him into a corner and make him commit himself. I flayed him with words, but he remained unmoved. He could afford to ignore me for at that time he was the victor. It was he who had triumphed in the battle for Natalia Ivanovna.

Of course, I had never really intended to have anything more to do with the Grand Duke and his family. They had insulted me and belittled me. They had chosen a charlatan's in preference to my advice. But I could not keep away. Partly it was because I was unable to bring myself to sever so old a tie. These two old people held a magic hold on me, linking me with a past that, for all its faults, I still loved. That was part of it—pure sentimentality perhaps, but what would life be if there were no sentiment? Would a life led according to the plans of the so-called 'realists' be comfortable and happy? I doubt it even as, though a doctor, I have no particular liking for the 'scientific home of the future' in which the winds of heaven are replaced by sterilized, conditioned air and God's gracious sunlight by the artificial rays of an electric lamp. These realists are not truly realists because they ignore the force of contrast. A life without winter would not make us appreciate perpetual summer more; rather should we pine for the sharp tang of the frosty air on our cheeks. And a life without sentiment, animated by logic and logic alone, would lack even the semblance of humanity.

So it was sentiment, then, that made me forget my feud with Pyotr and visit the Grand Duke's house. And there was something else. I was still deeply concerned about Natalia Ivanovna. I wanted to keep her under observation, to be by her side when the developments I regarded as inevitable should occur.

My observations had to be carried out surreptitiously. It would have been disastrous to confess that I refused, even then, to accept the verdict of the holy father. And at times I almost wondered whether my judgement was at fault. She looked so well and happy. She bubbled over with her exuberant spirits. She was gay, younger than her years, at times a girl with the wisdom of a woman and the compassion of a saint. Never once, though I studied her closely, did she give the slightest sign of pain or even discomfort.

Once Natalia Ivanova did return to the case, however. I had been present at a minor celebration—some obscure Russian festival. The Grand Duke made it a point to observe all these faithfully, though

I doubt whether he had even heard of some of them when he had lived in Russia. There had been champagne, and the Grand Duchess was as sparkling as wine. I had placed a cushion behind her back and asked her if she was comfortable.

She smiled brilliantly. 'Now you mustn't treat me like a patient, George,' she said. 'You know you've got to admit defeat.'

'Defeat?' I echoed. The affair with Father Pyotr was far from my mind. I did not expect her to bring it up.

'Yes, defeat.' She emphasized the word slightly, and it made me realize her gaiety was a little forced. 'Utter and complete defeat, my child. Your precious diagnosis has been disproved. I haven't been so well for years. Father Pyotr has saved my life—and you, you young scoundrel, you all but promised me the grave.'

'I am glad to hear you feel on top of the world, Natalia Ivanovna,' I said colourlessly. I felt rather taken aback.

'Ah, I can see you don't believe me,' she went on. 'You're not a good loser, George. You may have turned yourself into an Englishman, but you haven't learnt how to turn every defeat into a brilliant victory. You will never be either a leading politician or a famous British general.'

'I certainly don't wish to become a politician, and I couldn't be a general,' I returned hurriedly. 'As to the other part, I am quite sure you feel remarkably well.'

'There's something too carefully correct in that answer, George.' She looked me straight in the face, and for the first time I detected a look of doubt and fear in her eyes. 'Don't you think I look well?' she added with a suggestion of anxiety.

'You cannot look anything but charming.'

She laughed. 'Very pretty, George. You may have full marks for getting yourself out of an awkward corner so neatly. But do you think it right to pay compliments to an old woman like me when there is a young girl like Dania in the room?'

'The Princess Dania knows how very beautiful she is, I'm sure,' I said, feeling that gallantry was demanded of me. 'She does not need me to tell her.'

Dania looked at me and shrugged, but made no comment. I do not think she had forgiven me for my words with Pyotr. Her smiles, her attentions, were always for the dark monk.

George,' said Natalia Ivanovna suddenly, 'you are clever but not quite clever enough. You avoided answering my question. You are playing with me. I am not used to such treatment.'

She had brought up the subject which I had regarded as taboo. All my old soreness and resentment returned. The whole memory of that humiliating scene overwhelmed me, and I hardly knew what I was saying.

'I understand', I said slowly and distinctly, 'that the treatment I suggested for you was not . . .' I hesitated, 'agreeable.'

I saw her wince, and in the moment before pity filled me—pity and regret for my uncouthness—I experienced a thrill of triumph.

'George, George,' she cried reprovingly, 'have mercy on an old woman who could be your mother—and who at least loves you like a mother.'

'That is returning good for evil,' I said humbly. 'It is the kindest thing I have had said to me for many a long day.'

'Now tell me,' she asked pitifully, 'do I look well?'

'The question is, rather, do you feel well?' I countered. She did as a matter of fact look brilliant. It was the brilliance of a nova—a new star blazing up to many times its normal magnitude before it dies.

The Grand Duke looked sternly at me. 'No, George, you will not hear what I almost persuade myself you want to hear. Natalia Ivanovna is very well. She has occasional pains due to flatulence, but that is quite harmless and there is no cause for worry. You would say so yourself.'

I had caught a look of fear in Natalia Ivanovna's eyes, which I held steadily with my own. Perhaps it was a chance. Perhaps she had deliberately engineered this situation to give me that chance. I could not let it slip.

'Would you like me to examine you, Natalia Ivanovna?' I asked evenly.

'We did not invite you here for a consultation, George,' said Ivan Pavlovitch quickly. 'We do not doubt the word of the holy father.'

'Haven't you any faith at all in me, Natalia Ivanovna?' I persisted. The Grand Duke was not to be allowed to sidetrack the issue. I felt the Grand Duchess wanted to speak, to make a decision but had not the courage.

'Of course I have, my dear boy,' she replied, 'but my mirror tells me there is no need to consult you. I am looking well. I know it, even if you refuse to admit it. I am feeling well. To-night let us forget all the ills of humanity. We will celebrate. The holy father will be here and will light the candles at midnight. He will preach

to us in Russian. For a little while—a very little while—we shall be back in Petersburg before the war, the last war.' She looked at me quickly. 'There are too many wars, George. It is always better to avoid conflict if we can—always. Sometimes I think no price is too big to pay for peace. Give me my glass. Let us drink to peace—peace for all the generations to come that they may live under skies free of those horrible clouds of war that darken everything, not least the hearts and minds of men.'

We drank with her.

'Let us drink to Russia,' said the Grand Duke, 'the true Russia, the Russia that will return, the Russia of the Tsars and . . .'

'No,' I interposed. 'Let us forget all these partisan Russias. Let us drink to Russia by all means, but let it be the eternal Russia, the Russia whose men and women turned back Napoleon from Moscow as her men and women will turn back Hitler to-day. The Russia that never dies, that will live always, greater than any system, any ideology, any religion.'

'Well spoken, George!' cried Natalia Ivanovna. 'Let us forget all this business of White and Red, of their Russia and ours. Let us be frank to-night. Why do I call the Russia of the Tsars my Russia? Is it because I wish to be there again, to enjoy riches and servants and all the rest? No, I know it. Ivan Pavlovitch knows it. It is because it is the Russia of my youth, the place where I first made the acquaintance of life. Ah, we always give our age away when we start comparing things! "How much better", someone says, "the dance tunes of yesterday, of ten, fifteen, twenty years ago are than to-day's." Are they, George? Not a bit! They are the same crackpot things—some of them are even the same tunes under a different name. But the man who said it first heard them ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. Their sentimental words meant something to him then: now they only sound mawkish and absurd. So it is with us White Russians. I don't know whether the new Russia is better or worse than the old. I am inclined to believe it is much the same, that there are rich men and poor, powerful men and common people, that men want the same things—warmth and food and comfort and wives and families. You men think politics are everything. They're not. They're not nearly as important as love and friendship. Drain all your politics away and those will remain. But kill love—if you can—and nothing would survive.'

She sat back in her chair, eyes sparkling.

'Brilliant,' I exclaimed. 'Profound and true!'

Ivan Pavlovitch was silent. He looked worried. Perhaps he, too, was realizing that the cause to which he had devoted himself was lost. But the Grand Duchess held the stage. I fancied she was talking in riddles for my benefit.

'You men are far too ready to get caught up in abstractions,' she went on. 'Your theories, your ideas, mean more to you than the real things of life. Remember that, George. It is only happiness that counts—the happiness that comes of love and friendship. There is nothing else. Some find it one way, some another. The main thing is to find it.'

'You are amazing to-night, Natalia Ivanovna,' I said.

'It is wonderful what a glass or two of champagne will do for me,' she rejoined. 'The truth dawns on me then: it flashes in my mind as each bubble bursts. Let us have some music, Ivan Pavlovitch.'

The Grand Duke crossed to the radio-gramophone and put on a record. It was Tschaikovsky, of course. Nothing else but his nostalgic bitter-sweetness would have been fitting for them.

I left soon afterwards, feeling puzzled. The Grand Duchess's condition worried me. I was sure I had not been wrong when I had suspected she wanted to renounce her faith in Pyotr's diagnosis. But she was loyal—loyal even against her reason and, horrible thought, perhaps in spite of her own pain.

'Come again, George,' she had called after me as I left. 'We will have more champagne, and I will expose more aspects of the truth for you.'

I had promised I would. But I was not to see her again until I was summoned to her by that desperate call.

Chapter 18

The Professor

To one who has lived in several countries the immense personal tragedy of war is perhaps plainer than to the stay-at-home, no matter how liberal or broad-minded he may be. I had lived for some years in both Germany and Italy and, as I had told that keen-witted inspector who called on me, I had formed friendships in a good many places. Many of those friends were now enemies, and I could not think of them as otherwise. They were good citizens of their respective countries—good, that is to say, in the sense that they put their country's alleged interests first—and I could not imagine them as doing anything but help their own governments in what they no doubt regarded as right.

But this was a war that could not be neatly divided off into friends and enemies. It was an ideological war right from the beginning. On the one side, as politicians keep pointing out with more common sense than is usual in their utterances, were the friends of freedom; on the other stood the foes of progress, the believers in force and barbarism. Between those two sides lay a choice that many honest people could not decide by the mere accident of birth in a particular patch of territory given a special colour of its own on the map.

Ever since the Nazis came to power Germany had been demonstrating that political beliefs had become more important than nationality. She had two main methods of dealing with those who would not accept the thesis that being German and accepting *in toto* all the Nazi doctrines were one and the same thing. Those she considered the most dangerous and who had been most outspoken in their criticism were immured in the hells of the concentration camps. They were not all Jews, and it is probable that the non-Jewish internees were treated even more savagely than the Jews, just because they had not the imagined crime of non-Aryan blood to be urged in mitigation of their obtuseness. The less dangerous or the more adroit were allowed to escape, to swell the army of refugees that marched into France and Britain and America and the other countries of the world where the idea of freedom of conscience and expression was still held to be worth while.

Despite the atrocities in Poland and Yugoslavia, in Russia and Norway, this treatment of their own fellow-countrymen by the Nazis remains one of their blackest crimes. There is a certain crude realism in the German philosophy of war. War, based on bloodshed and terror, must in the German view be made as horrible as possible to the enemy so that he will succumb the more quickly; and if that involves torturing and maiming the civilian population, the old men, the women and the children, it is all one. If the Germans shatter streets of humble homes with their bombs, as they did during the blitz, the excuse is ready: the attack had demoralized and put out of action some hundreds of workers and the enemy's war effort is hampered. The Nazi method is to apply the resources of science and twentieth-century knowledge to the exploitation of barbarism of the most primitive kind. Theirs is the most primitive war made more terrible by weapons no primitive people ever commanded. It cannot be condoned. It is a crime against that spirit which has driven man upwards from the apes, the Stone Age, and the more cultured cruelty of the Dark Ages. But there is just that spark of distorted reason in it which causes some to see in the Nazi philosophy of war a grain of justification.

The crimes against their own nationals stand without even this right of appeal by the Devil's Advocate. As civil war is the most terrible of all wars, so is brutality against one's own fellow-country-men the lowest depths of barbarism. In my youth I saw at first-hand the excesses into which civil war can plunge a people. The Nazis' civil war has been more terrible still. It has been the torturing of the helpless, the maiming of the sane and innocent simply because they claimed man's inalienable right to use his brain to think his own thoughts.

Everyone has seen the dull resentment and the active hatred this arouses. In this country are many refugees who till Hitler came had been proud to think they were German, but now throw themselves wholeheartedly into the struggle against Germany. This ideological war is a civil war of the world. Nationality does not count primarily. It is the attitude to life that surmounts all else. For, as Lord Haw-Haw and his colleagues have shown, there are those who were prepared to deny freedom and embrace the Nazi cause. There are people who thought—and perhaps still think—that it would be better to adopt Hitler's plans and make friends with his bloodstained butchers than to fight for all the liberties that centuries of struggle have won for Englishmen. It was men of this perverted frame of mind who opened the door to the invaders of Norway and

cast away the fruits of the French Revolution on the altar of the Nazi gods.

It is impossible to divide men and women into two mutually exclusive classes. There are the cowards and the brave—yes; but also there are those who are neither cowardly nor brave, who show on one occasion surprising independence, on another an equally surprising subservience. There are men who subdue their natural feelings of revolt and defiance because they fear, not the enemy itself confronting them, but the consequences of revolt or defiance. Every drop of blood in a man's veins may make him want to cry out against an injustice or humiliation to which he has been subjected; but conscience tells him that if he does so he may bring starvation to his family. Is that man wholly a coward? It is a nice point of ethics. Let those whose business it is to trade in subtleties and high-sounding words answer the question.

Often during these days of war I have found myself wondering what has happened to this friend of former years, what that one or this might be doing now. It is easy to imagine the fate of some. Some of the students I worked with were obviously destined more for the uniform of the Nazi than the white gown of the surgeon. They would be more at home with the butcher's knife than the scalpel. Of others there is no need to imagine the fate. Some disappeared without trace. One knows what happens to people who do that in Germany. Others died, or were dragged away to concentration camps with the words of freedom and independence of spirit still burning on their lips. These men may be dead, but theirs is the spirit of man which the Nazi cannot kill. Theirs is the spirit that marches with the armies of freedom.

Strange things happened to some of the men I knew. I have had to revise my opinion of some. The reputation of others stands higher than ever in my esteem. I think of one man I knew who used to talk largely and loudly of humanitarianism who seemed destined by Nature to be one of the great healers of modern times. We students looked up to him in those far-off days when we took words far too much to be the index of the man. I heard of this man several times in after years. He mounted higher and higher in his career. The tale of his successful treatments grew steadily longer. Then came the Nazis. He renounced all he had ever preached and practised. He abandoned even his chosen profession. The last time I heard his name mentioned was on the Moscow radio. It was read out among a list of those who had been proved guilty of the most

horrible atrocities during the early invasion of Russia, where he had held high rank in the German Army.

One saw him then as he really was. His talk of the humanities had been bluff. It had sounded well and had attracted favourable attention in times when liberal ideas were the fashion. When they declined in popularity his views changed. He did not seek fame as a surgeon, but power for its own sake. He wanted to have the lives of men and women in his hands. In the hospital and operating theatre he could satisfy that desire—to some extent. But the Nazis gave him another and, to his mind, a better way of fulfilling his inmost wishes. He became a butcher. He slew where before he had saved lives. He tortured and maimed where he had brought relief from suffering.

Freud says that a surgeon is a man who sublimates an inherent tendency towards sadism. I had always doubted it. But with that case before me, I began to wonder whether in this instance at least Freud has not spoken a profound truth.

The most curious case of all among my early associates was that of Professor Bauer. In my student days he was as a god to me. I saw him not so much as a man as the personification of surgery. To my youthful eyes it seemed to me that he performed miracles. Cases that lesser men—though men of high reputation—pronounced hopeless he not only saved from the snapping jaws of death but sent back whole and healed. Surgery as a whole was much indebted to him for the original refinements he introduced into many a procedure.

Beside his technical skill, he was a great man. I learnt much from him, not only as a surgeon but as a man. He showed me that a good surgeon must also be a man of understanding, that mere adroitness of technique was not in itself enough.

He was head of his hospital. Later, just before Hitler rose to power, he was made principal of his university. As I began to realize what the Nazis stood for, I watched and waited for the coming clash; for there was nothing in common between the brutal, destructive aims of the Nazis and the idealistic, humanitarian, constructive principles of Professor Bauer.

The clash came. How and in what way I never found out. But I learnt that Bauer had been stripped of his positions. He was without an appointment. He was suffering the fate of so many like him who felt a greater loyalty to truth and honour than to a land which they now hesitated to call Fatherland. I fully expected to hear of his arrival in England, and wondered whether the somewhat

inelastic British medical system could be stretched sufficiently to allow of the admission of a man so talented and outstanding.

But the news never arrived. Bauer stayed in Germany. What he did I was unable to discover at first. I think he must have suffered poverty and privation for a time. The tide of émigré intellectuals, scientists, doctors, poets, philosophers, architects, and engineers was at full flood, but it did not bear Professor Bauer with it. I thought perhaps he had managed to go straight to America, and I even had enquiries made. But there were no tidings. Bauer had disappeared. I began to fear the worst. He was a man who had worn himself thin in a science and art which, in his own words, no man could master in a lifetime. And I asked myself how such a man could stand up to the organized brutalities of a concentration camp, or even a Nazi prison.

I had almost added his name to the great list of unrecorded casualties of Hitler's 'bloodless' revolution, when the most surprising news reached me. Bauer was back, I was informed; and there was no doubting the authenticity of the news. He was not merely back in his old university but restored to his old Chair. The headship was now naturally in the hands of a Party official, but there was now no doubt that the professor was rehabilitated as far as conditions made it possible.

At first I was pleased at the news. It was then fairly early in the Nazi régime and I had enough illusions left to believe that perhaps the Nazis had relented and seen that by depriving Bauer of his position they were depriving themselves of one of their richest assets. If Hitler's aim was war, then he would surely need the best surgical knowledge. It would be sheer crime from his point of view to destroy Bauer who had done so much to keep German surgery in the forefront of progress. No hidebound political theory could be as foolish as that.

In 1938 I passed through Germany and I made a detour in my journey specially to look up my old teacher and inspiration. I had done so several times before and always I had received the most cordial of welcomes. No doubt, I told myself, I should hear the truth of what had been happening to him. I found myself looking forward to this visit eagerly.

I had no difficulty in obtaining access to him. This was reassuring, for I had found in Nazi Germany that people of importance were becoming more and more difficult to see. Barriers were being erected where none had existed before, and I had already been denied interviews with one or two people who in the days of the Weimar Republic would have been glad to chat with me.

He had the same secretary as when I last called on him, a woman so typically and aggressively Nordic that all Hitler's Race Purity fiends could not have found anything wrong with her. With her blonde hair coiled in 'telephones' over her ears, her light blue eyes, and her fulsome figure, she might have served an artist well as a model for Germania herself.

She smiled when I asked if I might see the professor.

'But of course, Herr Sava,' she said. 'Is he not always glad to see you?'

'I have always hoped so,' I replied; and she smiled again.

A minute later I was being shown into Bauer's room. Almost at once I was conscious of a changed atmosphere. That room I thought I knew inside out. There was the untidy bookcase, with the latest medical works straight from the publishers': medical works in three languages thrown carelessly on top of it; there was the desk, almost a chaos of papers. It had always looked the room of a man too busy to study its effects on chance callers. They must take me as they find me—that had seemed the message Bauer had wanted to deliver to his visitors.

Now everything was different. The bookcase had a glass front and the shelves were neatly stacked. The top of the bookcase was clear except for an empty vase. But what focused my attention first was the large picture overhanging Bauer's chair: a portrait of Hitler, bearing the autograph signature of the Führer himself. It startled me till I remembered I had seen similar ones in the offices of everyone holding important positions. No doubt their exhibition was a condition of appointment.

Bauer was standing behind his desk, smiling. As I looked at him I had another shock. In his coat lapel was the Nazi Party badge. I was trying to explain it away, but was not so successful in convincing myself. Possibly he might have had to join the Party in order to put himself in good odour with his masters. But was it necessary to flaunt the fact so much?

However, the professor looked the same in himself. The smile was as welcoming, though he did not come round the table and slap me on the back as he used to do. Perhaps that sort of cordiality was not considered fitting in Nazi Germany.

I held out my hand. The professor raised his in the Nazi salute and growled 'Heil Hitler!' Then he shook hands with me warmly.

'Sit down, Sava,' he said. 'I will sit down myself . . . I've lost a leg, as perhaps you can see, and the other's not too good. But we can

leave my troubles out of it. How are you? You're looking fit and prosperous.'

I sank rather than sat in the chair. I had been so taken up with surveying the room that I had not noticed Bauer's condition. I saw now that he was supporting himself gently and with difficulty into his seat, his face twitched momentarily with pain. My thoughts became a torrent. What was the meaning of this? Had he left his leg in a Nazi concentration camp? Had they tortured him into submission? Then I thought of the proud, independent man I had known: the man who would brook no authority but his own, and had a short, sharp way with anyone who tried to teach him his business. No, that was impossible. An accident perhaps, or. . . .

'I'm sorry to see you like this, professor,' I found myself saying. 'Did it. . . . How . . .?'

He smiled grimly. 'Let's not discuss that,' he said. 'So you're a British subject now, I hear, and doing well. I read your papers in the British medical journals. Not bad some of them. You're still as independent as ever, I see. Well, that's not a bad trait, though it has its disadvantages sometimes.'

I became conscious of an unnatural and unfamiliar constraint about him. I looked full into his eyes, and he avoided mine. The glimpse I had of them showed they were nervous, darting hither and thither the whole of the time. He seemed rather at a loss to make conversation. This was certainly not like the Bauer I had known.

'I'm here on a flying visit,' I said. 'But I could not come through Germany without looking you up. I am glad to find you in your old post.'

That's an opening for him, I thought. Now he'll tell me all about it.

He merely shrugged slightly. 'I am glad to be here,' he said. 'But tell me of yourself. You are busy?'

'Mine is the lot of every surgeon in consulting practice, professor,' I replied. 'I operate in hospitals. Patients come to consult me in Harley Street. For some operations I get large fees, for others —and often more difficult ones—I get nothing at all. I enjoy all the advantages of my profession and suffer all its drawbacks, particularly the attentions of those who seem to think that a doctor's brains are to be picked clean for nothing, especially after a good dinner. You are as familiar with all this as I am. There is nothing more to tell.'

He smiled. 'You speak like a man to whom success has brought disillusion,' he remarked.

'Life is made up of illusions and disillusions,' I returned, determined to say nothing of importance. If he was going to be unrevealing so was I. In any event I was sure he had the better tale to tell. I looked pointedly at his coat lapel. 'I see you are a member of the Party.'

His hand started almost guiltily to the badge. 'Yes,' he said quickly. 'One cannot hold a Chair unless one is a Party member.'

'I see. But I thought you resigned when the Nazis came to power . . . or were thrown out, like so many others.'

He hesitated for a moment and looked about him with a furtive air.

'I was forced to resign,' he said slowly. 'They didn't do anything else to me. I was fortunate there. I lived as best I could, then I was called one day to the hospital.' He spoke slowly and awkwardly as though a confession was being wrung from him. 'I do not know how they found me, except that the Gestapo has eyes and ears everywhere. It is their job, after all.' The last words were added as a sort of justification, as if he had just recalled he was a Party member.

'There had been an accident,' he went on. 'The son of the local SS commandant had broken his spine. The case looked hopeless. They remembered me then,' he added bitterly. 'I was acting as a part-time dispenser to a chemist at the time, and living in a room—or rather part of a room. I was sharing it with four others and several hundred lice. The case was successful after my treatment.' He shrugged. 'You know how these things happen. You do good sound work day after day and nobody notices. Then you undertake a case with a thousand to one chances against you. The thousandth chance comes off and you are immediately famous. Luck is more important than good work—but I expect you know that by now.'

I knew Bauer too well to pay much attention to this piece of self-deprecation.

'I was given a fee, and returned to obscurity, though I was told to report daily at the hospital so that I could keep my eye on the case. It went well. The boy had a marvellous constitution. When I sent him away to a convalescent home I thought that was the end of it. I was to go back to my punishment, a fit one for my own crimes. Every day I had to decipher doctors' handwriting on prescriptions.'

'Was nothing said about your returning to the hospital?' I asked, as he paused and showed no signs of going on with the story.

'Not at the time. But a week later I was sent for by the commandant. He was very polite. I had seen him before, and he was not then so polite. That was when they turned me out. I told them

a surgeon had nothing to do with politics, and they did not like it. That was why I resigned.'

'I see. They didn't throw you out then?'

'I didn't give them time. But all that is more or less forgotten. Well, the commandant was most grateful. He thanked me for what I had done, and called it a miracle; not one of God's miracles, but a miracle of skill. Then he looked hard at me.

'"We are building a new Germany," he said. "We are going to make it the most efficient country in the world. We need all the help we can get." "Yes," I admitted, "you'll need that." He looked at me still harder. "We want brains. You are a brilliant surgeon. It is treachery to Germany if you do not place yourself at the disposal of the State."

'"I have no quarrel with the new State," I replied. "It does not concern me. I am a surgeon and surgery has nothing to do with politics." That was the remark I had made before, but this time it did not rouse him particularly.

'"How would you like your old position back? As professor of surgery," he added quickly, "not as head of the university."

'"Of course I should like it back," I said bitterly. "Do you think I enjoy making up prescriptions that even a third-year student could see were wrong?"

'"It is waste of great talent—genius, in fact," he retorted. "The Reich does not wish its subjects to waste their abilities. The Chair can be yours if you like."

'I looked at him, not knowing what to say. I had some suspicion, of course. I knew there must be conditions, and asked what these were.

'"Quite simple," he replied. "We ask nothing beyond what we expect of every true German. We merely insist that you join the Party. Your entry will be facilitated if you agree."

'"But", I protested, "I know nothing of politics, as I have already told you. A surgeon is concerned only with his work."

'"No-one can be independent of politics," he replied. "And in the case of a surgeon they are particularly important."

'"I don't see why," I said. He grinned at me as though I was very thick-headed . . . and perhaps I am when it comes to politics.

'"Think a bit," he said. "You are a surgeon in a responsible position. You have exceptional skill. You are head of a great hospital. A very serious case is brought to you. Perhaps it is the Führer himself. Suppose you are one of those malcontents, one of those renegades who follow non-German leads. Do you think that

for all your skill we could trust so important a case to you? Obviously not. That is why we can have in our key positions only men we can trust; men who have publicly declared their faith in the Führer and the new Germany. We cannot allow others to have power of life and death over our leaders."

'"But this is preposterous!" I exclaimed. "A surgeon does not think of such things. He has a case brought to him. It does not matter whether it is his closest friend or his most bitter enemy. His job is to save life and alleviate suffering. If he is a good surgeon that is what he will do. The personal motive does not enter into it at all".'

Bauer was getting a little more animated, but there was still that curious air about him as though in telling me all this he was committing some crime or giving away State secrets, as he continued:

'The commandant looked at me with a faint, crooked smile. "I have a very high opinion of the medical profession and its code of honour," he remarked. "But no code of honour is proof against the filthy teachings of the Jews and the Communists. A surgeon may be an honourable doctor—in principle; but he is also human. His mind may have been poisoned by Marxist or liberal teachings. We have to be safe."

'I did not like this argument. It ran counter to all I believed,' went on Bauer. 'I felt there was some sort of truth in his remarks. There was a revolution going on, and strange things happen in revolutions.

'"So", I said, "it comes down to this. If I become a Party member and promise to abide by Nazi principles in all I do, I can have my old position back?"

'"That is so," he said. "I'm glad you are beginning to see reason. We live in a practical world, Herr Professor, and we must not allow theories of conduct to influence us too much. We have already had to purge the medical profession quite a lot, I regret to say. Jews had flocked into it, no doubt to use that very code of honour you expounded just now as a cloak for their ritual murders and other crimes. The Propaganda Ministry is preparing statistics to show that the proportion of deaths among Germans treated by Jewish doctors is higher than the figure for Germans treated by Germans, or Jews treated by Jews."

'"That does not concern me," I said. I was not going to get embroiled in a political argument. "Have I to make a decision now?"

'"As it is a decision that must be a true one," he replied, "you may have forty-eight hours to think it over. If you leapt at it now, it would be difficult to believe. The Führer does not hold with sudden conversions. But I think you will see that it is only just and reason-

able, and that under the Third Reich you will have much greater opportunity of serving Germany than ever before."

'I went away to my garret. I sat up the whole night', the Professor continued, 'after my day's dispensing was done, and thought it all out. I began to see what he was driving at. I saw there was reason behind it—good solid reason, for there have been many people in Germany these last twenty years who have put self-interest, or the interest of their own class or race, above the good of the State. I began to recognize that there was quite a lot of good in the Nazis after all, and that I had been misled through Jewish-Marxist propaganda into thinking otherwise.' These phrases sat oddly on his lips and lacked real sincerity. 'And I also saw that membership of the Party was necessary as a qualification for any responsible position in the new State they were building. A Party member can be kept under the strictest surveillance. It is necessary.'

'So you joined the Party?' I prompted, as he paused again.

He nodded. 'Yes. At the appointed hour I went back and had an interview with the commandant. He was still very polite. I told him I had made my decision and agreed to become a member of the Party. He told me I must undergo some sort of initiation and study Nazi doctrines. This, of course, I had expected. When I had gone to school again and taken the oath, I was admitted as a Party member and given back my Chair. I had learnt my lesson—the lesson the Führer is trying to teach all Germany and perhaps some day will teach the whole world.'

'And that lesson is?' I asked curiously.

'Discipline. We surgeons learnt it, but as a rule we have not in the past applied the strictest discipline of the operating theatre and the consulting-room to the larger issues of life. It is very important. It is lack of discipline that is the root of all the troubles in the world to-day.'

Again I felt these phrases were being repeated second-hand. They did not carry conviction.

'Did you find the hospital as you left it?' I inquired.

'More or less. Quite a number of the staff had been changed. But then, as you will remember, we had been infiltrated with Jews. Some of them were clever in a way, but their presence obviously could not be tolerated.'

'I see.'

There must have been a note of disapproval in my voice, for he looked up sharply. His mood changed suddenly. He became the old fighting, independent man I had always known. He barked—

and in my mind I was back again in the lecture theatre watching the professor dealing with an impertinent student who asked pestilential questions.

'That is my story,' he snapped. 'That is the story I tell—I was going to say am allowed to tell—on the few occasions when I think it worth while. But what is the truth, Sava? You guess it, of course, you do. You are not blind. You are not ignorant of what is going on in Germany. I am here on sufferance because my brain holds certain knowledge the Nazis want and cannot get elsewhere. They know I am not interested in their economic and racial theories. But I am an old man, and I can do them no great harm at the worst. At the best I may be useful to them—when I have imparted all I know to the young men who come here and treat me as though I was dirt. I am spied upon all the time—even by my own secretary, who has been with me for years. She was one of the first women to join the Nazi movement. I am nominally head of my department, but I am a nonentity. If I issue an order and these young dogs in brown shirts don't like it, there is an appeal to the Party, and I am warned. In the old days I used to have direct access to Ministers. Now I am reminded at every turn that I am just a paid servant, and that the penalties for unlawful thoughts and actions are far greater for a Party member than for the general public. But I am old, I repeat, so what does it matter?'

'To me, it seems to matter a lot,' I said. I hated to see this once proud man so humbled. 'Tell me honestly, do you think what you have gained is worth the price you have paid, and are continuing to pay?'

'You are young, Sava,' he said impatiently, 'and I am old. We look at things differently. You could start life all over again if you had to. I cannot. I want only to be among the familiar things. I have no time for new adventures or fresh starts.'

'Is there nothing you could do?'

'Of course I can do nothing. I am a German and am, therefore, powerless. All of us are powerless. Every one of us is a Nazi because we all allowed them to get into power. We were the passive criminals, if they were the active ones. Some of us believed that they would do good for the country. We were tired of the chaos and the corruption, the muddling and the extravagance. I can see now that it was all a façade—this talk of a new and greater Germany. It is what everyone wants to see, but to each of us probably that word "greater" means something different. The Nazis have done some good things—oh, yes, I know that. Some of them were done to make

an impression and give the Party good odour abroad. But whatever the Nazis do they do for the wrong reason. They build roads—but only so that they can move their armies quicker. They build aeroplanes, but not so that they can bring together the people in peace: they build them for war and destruction. They encourage surgery—but only so that their wounded soldiers may not die when their war of retribution, their bloody avenging of Versailles materializes.

'Some of us became Nazis for one reason, some for another. All of us sold our souls for a mess of pottage.'

'And your mess of pottage was your Chair and the right to exercise your profession?'

'No. Even as an outcast I could have worked as a surgeon. I could have gone abroad perhaps. No, do not misjudge me to that extent.'

'What was it then?' I looked at that firm, straight mouth and the resolute jaw. And I compared them with the shifting nervous look of the eyes.

'Because I had left some work unfinished,' he replied. 'I have seen what they do to knowledge—they twist and turn it to ignoble ends. I wanted mine finished by my own hands. I have not participated actively in their brutalities, even though I wear the badge. My only crime lies between my conscience and myself. I have already given much for my experiments: this leg, for example . . . and the other will soon follow it.'

I started. So that was the secret of the leg. He was killing himself piecemeal.

'That is how I try to salve my conscience,' he went on more bitterly. 'I think perhaps I may do something, even if only a trifle, towards turning evil into good. I am one of the lucky ones . . . lucky because I am old and have had the chance to do some good, I hope, in my lifetime. I am not like the young ones who will never have that chance while the Nazis rule. I have work to do. If I die in doing it, so much the better.'

'But, professor,' I burst out, 'surely this is madness! Even if you complete your work it will only be turned to base uses. You yourself said so just now. Would it not have been better to have gone into exile among people who would have understood and treasured your labour? You are well known. America would have welcomed you, if England would not.'

He smiled wryly. 'No. I keep telling you I am old. I cannot uproot myself and transplant elsewhere. My habits are fixed. They are my own habits —but they are also German habits, and would not fit in

with American or English habits. No, Sava, that would have been a young man's choice. Forty, fifty years ago I might have made it gladly.

'But you are right, Sava. You have touched on the point that pricks me even when I see success for my efforts. My work, such as it is, will be lost to the world at large. It will be appropriated to the cause of death and destruction.'

'Your work, professor, what is it? May I ask that, as an old friend, and in no sense a professional rival?'

'Think of Ehrlich and what he set out to do—to find his "Magic bullet" that would slay organisms in the blood without injuring the whole system. My aim is something like that. I am seeking a new method that has the power of death: death to dead and morbid tissue, a chemical knife to replace our knives of steel, Sava. And I am already a long way there. But it is an agent of death. Used one way it will slay morbid tissue. Used another it will bring death to the healthiest. I know very well what use the Nazis will make of it, if I succeed. They have only one conception of life.'

'It is a two-edged sword,' I remarked. I did not know whether he was talking sense or indulging in the overwrought fancies of a tired and tiring brain that had been strained too much by affairs. He gave me no scientific details. To this day I do not know the truth about his search for the 'chemical knife', as he called it. He had shown himself ready and able to delude himself in some things. Was he, who had the keenest mind among the surgeons of his day, now deluding himself in all things?

'Life itself is a two-edged sword,' he retorted. 'Man can drive himself either way—backward to death or forward to life. It is not for the scientist to decide for him. The scientist's task is to discover facts and relations, causes and effects. Is it my fault if some people prefer to go backwards to death? They have the choice open to them. Shall I stop my efforts because there are people like that? No, Sava, you know that is impossible. It would mean the end of all scientific research if the experimenter paused to consider the ill-effects his work might have. There are a hundred—a thousand—discoveries that have enriched men's lot and brought them life where before there was only death—and have also brought death and destruction. Think of coal, which we use to produce light and heat, and which we also distil to make high explosives. I must serve the cause of life. I must not stop because I realize that the servants of death may steal the harvest of my toil. I do not profess to be able to see the end.

'Sometimes', he continued wearily, 'I try to persuade myself that

I am doing the right thing, that I am trying to save a little good from the bonfire of evil that has broken out. But there are others when I know that I fool myself. I wonder whether it is worth trying to serve life when first I must bow the knee to these devils. But have I any alternative? There is a spark of hope here. There would be none elsewhere. I have not the courage to commit suicide, though almost within reach of my hand are a dozen drugs that would bring a swift and painless end. But I can use this old body as a test tube, and that is what I am doing. I am striving for two ends: to die and to do some little good by my dying.'

I did not know what to say or do. He had completely dropped the pretence of being a Nazi and had spoken to me from his soul. In his puzzlement he reminded me of an old dog that has long dominated his fellows and at last finds himself, half blind and almost toothless with age, cornered by younger and brutal rivals. His spirit wanted to fight. His flesh was all too weak. He had compromised. Compromised with the Nazis, whom he obviously hated in his heart. Compromised with his whole life. Compromised with his conscience. He, the old fighter, was ashamed of his compromises, but he had not the strength to do otherwise. He was at once coward and brave man. He was fighting for a new and braver world, enrolled as a member of the Party that stood for the reinstatement of an older and darker one.

. . . . . .

In these times when almost every day brings some fresh evidence of Nazi brutality, I have thought often of Professor Bauer. How shall we judge men like him—men who with their hands make the Nazi salute and with their souls cry out against all the swastika stands for? Men who cling tenaciously amid the messengers of death to the ideal of life? Are they craven cowards or heroes? Have they trod the path of shame, or are they leaders along the difficult way that leads back to sanity and true values?

I do not know. History alone can judge. But I do know that the phrase he so often repeated in his talk to me was not only his own but also the cry of thousands in Germany at that time. 'What am I to do?'

And there lies one more of the tragedies of war. It welds and unites peoples, sweeping aside doubts. Many of those who wavered and compromised no doubt now burn with the desire to defend Germany, the Germany of the Nazis. I wonder whether Bauer is one of these, if his skill is now bent wholeheartedly on restoring damaged Nazis so that they may inflict fresh tortures on Russian women and children, or if a merciful fate brought his death from his 'chemical knife'.

Chapter 19

Etiquette versus Patient

Perhaps the most difficult problems of medicine are not those concerned with its purely technical and scientific aspects, but the niceties of preserving good relations with one's colleagues. When the SS commandant told Professor Bauer that surgeons had human failings, he was probably speaking greater truth than he realized.

Everyone knows how strict—deservedly strict—medical etiquette is. It is only right that a doctor should be bound by a code of honour that places him above suspicion, and that any breach of that code should receive prompt punishment. There is a great deal of controversy about medical etiquette as it affects the public, but probably most people at heart accept the need of a really rigorous praxis. After all, the doctor is called in to all sorts of delicate situations. He wields immense power. Heavy responsibilities are laid upon him. And the readiness with which the general public seek out and trust a strange doctor in emergency—a man they have never seen before—is a tribute to the standard that medical etiquette and the vigilance of the General Medical Council have built up.

But these problems are as nothing compared with those that arise in the dealings between doctor and doctor. One's own private opinion may be that a colleague is a crass fool. One may wonder how it was that he ever gained the qualifications the authenticity of which is vouched for by the *Medical Directory*. But one must not say so. To one medical practitioner every other medical practitioner is an equal. The one may be at the height of his powers and have had honours and high positions deservedly given him. The other may be little more than a student making his first essays in actual practice. But they are equal. The law, incidentally, draws no distinction between grades of medical degrees. It lays down a minimum, and anyone who attains that minimum may legally practise. If he subsequently works hard and acquires other and higher distinctions, his legal status is in no way altered. So this custom of treating a colleague as an equal has a certain amount of legal sanction behind it.

There are occasions when it is a very difficult canon to observe. If one's opinion is diametrically opposite to that of a colleague, one does not say so or even hint about it in front of a patient. One falls back on those monosyllables which seem to have been designed by Providence for the use of doctors. One says 'H'm' and 'Ha!' with varying inflections. But that is all. The wise doctor never commits himself. He is too conscious of his limitations.

And most difficult of all is clearing up the mistakes of others. The task is usually thrown on one without warning. The case is possibly serious and instant action is necessary. One does the job as best one can and perhaps makes a success of it. All might appear well and good, but actually one's troubles are only just beginning. The difficulties of tactfully defending the heinous action in finding out another man's mistake have to be faced. Doctors never make mistakes. It is only the patients, in their benighted ignorance, who act against the rules, which is why the most impeccable treatment in the world is sometimes unsuccessful.

One day when I arrived at the hospital prepared to face the programme of routine operations, I was met by an excited house-surgeon. I was a little late and brushed past him with a word of greeting.

'I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Sava,' he said quickly, refusing to be shaken off, 'but we've just had a woman brought in. Her condition is very serious, and none of us has been able to diagnose what is wrong with her. There's tenderness all over the gastric region.'

'Yes, yes,' I replied, not fully taking in this tirade. House-surgeons sometimes show great enthusiasm for what appear to them strange cases; and this young man was more enthusiastic than most. 'I'll attend to her in good time. I've got a Mr. Watkins for hernia first on my list to-day. You can send her in when I've finished with him—though that will mean warning the staff sister in Ward 3 not to prepare her next patient so early.'

'It won't wait, sir,' he pleaded, tugging at my sleeve. 'She's dying . . . and she's such a nice woman.'

I stopped short and glared at him.

'Why the blazes didn't you say so at first?' I demanded. 'I thought you'd just got a case for general diagnosis. All right, I'll be ready in a moment. Have her ready in the ward—and God help you if you've fooled me! I'll send you back to take all your examinations again.'

He smiled at me faintly but gratefully before he hurried away. He was a willing and capable fellow of twenty-six and had just taken his

M.B. I detected promise in him, and as he wanted to specialize in surgery I had taken him to all my major operations, whether inside the hospital or elsewhere. My threat had not been serious, and he knew it. His worried expression had decided me, for it betokened something more than mere solicitude for patients in general and women in particular.

As I made my way to the ward I reflected that Mr. Watkins, who had had his hernia for ten years and had worn a truss, would have to wait for another hour or so. No doubt he would bear his burden with fortitude and patience.

The little woman was already on the bed. The house-surgeon, Davies, leant over her.

'Can't be the liver,' he muttered. 'But what about the pancreas? Or perhaps . . .'

'Don't guess,' I said sharply. Her appearance completely baffled me. 'It beats me. What do you know of her history?'

'Very little, sir,' he replied, 'except that she has been ill for a long time.'

'That's obvious,' I remarked casually, as I was studying the emaciated body of the patient. Although she looked very old and tired, she could not have been more than forty years of age. But the unusual illness from which she was suffering had most certainly aged her prematurely. The question was to find out what was this puzzling disease that had so alarmed my house-surgeon.

'What do you think it is, sir?' the young man repeated.

'That's what we're going to find out,' I said, as I began carefully to examine the patient. 'I'm not even going to venture a guess. I have never seen anything quite like this before.' Her temperature and pulse charts were normal, and there was nothing in the clinical symptoms to show a definite physical disease. Yet no-one could mistake the seriousness of the woman's condition.

'How long have you been ill?' I asked her.

'For over six months,' came the feeble reply. I could see that even an ordinary conversation was a great effort for the patient.

As if guessing my thoughts, the woman looked at me imploringly, saying, 'I have written the history of my illness and if you will forgive me, I would rather you read it than ask me questions. I am so tired and even the slightest effort makes my head giddy.'

I confess I became more alarmed at the seriousness of her condition, but to venture a diagnosis was beyond my ability. One thing I noticed—that the patient needed more medical psychological

treatment than surgery. A psychoanalyst would have been more appropriate in this case. We all know that surgery is a very exacting science. We can operate on the body but not dissect the mind. But, I thought to myself, could we apply psychological treatment in surgery? Certainly the experiment might be worth while. No doubt it would be the first case that has ever been treated by surgical intervention. I was not surprised any more at the eagerness of my house surgeon. Like all young men, he was a great believer in the theories of Freud and Havelock Ellis, and I was sure that he knew more about this patient than he admitted.

'Is she a relation of yours?' I asked Davies, eager to embarrass him by way of revenge for having put me into such a predicament over the case. Not only had I to postpone the two operations that were scheduled for that morning, but also I found myself in front of a junior colleague bound to admit my ignorance.

'Well, Davies, you have given me a problem,' I said as we walked into my hospital room.

'What about her history, sir?' the house surgeon reminded me.

That was quite right. In my desire to make the correct diagnosis I omitted even to glance at the bulk of papers the woman had thrust in my hand. In order to justify my subsequent line of action, I think it would be better to give the history of the patient *verbatim*. Should I try to give it in my own way I might be tempted to change it and present her clinical symptoms in a more orderly medical way, and that no doubt would have spoiled the effect. The following is the patient's own story:

'For many years I had dreaded the horrible disease known as the scourge of mankind, or as we ordinary people call it—cancer. The picture of people dying of cancer has subconsciously preyed on my mind ever since I can remember. It was many years ago when, as a child of eight, I saw my grandmother, thin and bent, writhing in pain that, as she used to say, was eating her stomach. I remember even then wondering why it was that good women like my grannie should be subjected to such inhuman suffering. Later on I had to pass through the same agonies of impotence when my mother died and the doctor told us it was inoperable cancer. It had eaten my mother's stomach and had spread into all the other organs of her body. At that time I was just finishing my studies preparatory to being a school teacher. I remember arguing with the doctor, insisting that something surely could have been done to save my mother.

'And now it's my turn. I was convinced beyond doubt that the same disease that killed my grandmother and my mother would get hold of me. I used to lie awake at night wondering to whom would I go when the time came.

'I used to picture myself with the disease, twisting and turning in bed, racked with pain, crying and pleading for a cure which I knew had not yet been discovered. Then I would picture myself begging to be put to sleep for ever.

'Now at last it had come! I was doomed. Doomed by an insidious, evil growth which was relentless and indifferent as to whom it attacked and consumed. When I did sleep I had nightmares, seeing myself as a condemned woman, condemned to suffering and to a hopeless future. I was sure I had cancer.

'It began on my forty-fifth birthday. I remember it so well. My friends had come in to celebrate and we had all over-indulged at the dinner table. When the birthday-cake arrived, with its full complement of candles, I was expected to blow them all out. I wish I had never attempted such a feat. I took a deep breath—and then it happened. The room spun round and suddenly I was violently sick.

'I knew immediately that this was my first symptom. I had read about it often enough in our Home Medical Books. I became quite calm and without apparent concern I bade my friends good night and went to bed. Next day, after a restless night, I sent for my doctor and told him the whole story and of my convictions.

'He tried to spare my feelings by telling me that it was nothing, just a bilious attack. When he left I started to laugh until I had an attack of hysteria, and my companion who was with me stopped it by slapping my face.

'I tried to eat a little food, but I knew it was hopeless before I started. I felt ill and I vomited. How could food possibly pass out of my stomach when there was a growth blocking the exit channel? That was why my food returned the way it went in. The same afternoon I sent for my solicitor and spent a trying time making my will. I was unmarried, so my companion and a few friends would be my sole beneficiaries.

'When my doctor called the next day I was a lot worse. I had not slept for two nights and was feeling the full effects of my illness. The doctor, when he saw how haggard I looked, took my case more seriously and stayed with me nearly an hour, trying to assure me that I was worrying unduly about a myth, a fiction of my imagination. He said that it was not unusual for an unmarried woman of

my age to be over-anxious and fretful and it was due to the natural changes in the life-cycle.

'I tried to co-operate and told him that I fully appreciated all he said, but that he was mistaken in his diagnosis and that I had seen not only my parents but many friends also diagnosed too late for adequate treatment. That this should not happen to me I made clear my intention to see a specialist, in the hope that an operation would cure me. As the doctor could see I had made up my mind he agreed to make an appointment for me with a London specialist.

'A week passed before I was fit to travel to London and even then I was feeling very poorly. I had lost weight and had not been able to keep a scrap of food down. I had tried to sleep, but in vain. My legs felt very weak and it was with great effort that I made the journey. Later on my condition became worse, so the specialists came to see me at home, as it was impossible for me to travel.

'The first specialist I went to see annoyed me intensely, as he told me after examination that I was wasting his time and I should go home and eat a good meal. I took his advice and ate a large meal, but I shall never forget the result. I was terribly ill and vomited the food a short time after eating it. I thought I was going to die and I didn't care. I even felt like ending my own life that night, so wretched did I feel both physically and mentally.

'Things went from bad to worse and I had reached a point where I was scared to eat, firstly because I brought up the food again and, secondly, because I felt I might be aggravating the growth. I occasionally sipped a glass of warm milk, but nothing else. I lost about a stone in three weeks.

'My doctor suggested I should see a psychologist, although I told him it was no use and that I was convinced a surgeon was the only one who could do anything for me. The nerve specialist was charming and asked me to tell him the whole story. After numerous questions he tried to convince me that I was not suffering from cancer. But I still felt terribly ill and that unless I went into a cancer hospital for treatment I should be dead within a short time.

'Eventually my doctor sent me to a general hospital where I was X-rayed and had various tests performed on me, and I was told they were all negative. In my despair I went to several different doctors and I even went to faith healers, but all in vain.

'By this time I was wasted to a mere shadow of my former self. I had only imbibed liquid foods, mainly milk, and had not had a proper night's rest in the last two months. When from sheer exhaus-

tion I did fall asleep, I woke up in a cold sweat, trembling with fear and sometimes I would wake up screaming.

'I had given up all hope of ever finding anyone who could help me when a friend suggested I should see another surgeon in London. I made an appointment and unburdened my troubles to him. I wept and pleaded with him to help me. After listening to my story he asked who I had already seen and whether I had been sent to a psychologist. I gave him the necessary information and then he examined me with great care. At the end of the examination he gravely told me that to save my life he must operate. He said he had found the trouble, that it was a small growth blocking the food canal in my stomach, which could easily be removed, and I would certainly be cured.

"To-day I entered the hospital at which the doctor had a house appointment. He told me he would ask one of the surgeons, who was also his friend, to see me, and he felt sure that he was the man who would operate and try to save my life. May God help me to stand the ordeal.'

I looked at Dr. Davies' face when I had finished reading aloud the story. Now I understood why the man was so eager for me to see the patient and not let her be under one of the other surgeons.

'Well, Davies, what have you to say for yourself? I see that you knew this patient. And can you tell me why you didn't confess at the beginning?'

'Well, Mr. Sava, I wanted you to take the case. She is nothing to me, but I saw her through the recommendation of friends of mine, and I knew that if anything could be done to save this woman's life, it was you who could do it.'

There was no use being angry with my house surgeon. I knew he had acted in good faith, and I must confess that I myself was beginning to be interested in the case.

To begin with, it did not take me very long to realize that it was her mind that was ill. Not that she was mad, or anything like it; on the contrary, she was very intelligent and shrewd. All the same, she was convinced she was suffering from a small growth that had closed completely the pylorus (the passage between the stomach and the intestine). For over six months she had seen a number of doctors, X-ray specialists and psychoanalysts, but no-one could persuade her that her illness was purely imaginary. I can imagine the patience of the specialist who, keeping to orthodox lines, tried to persuade her that her stomach and intestine were in perfect health.

'It is wasting your time and mine,' some of the more conscientious might have told her, without realizing that they were dealing with a patient who would misconstrue and twist every word they said. The psychoanalyst, whose name was given as one of the best men in Harley Street, might have been able to help her had she been willing to submit to a year's treatment. The trouble, however, was not so much in the origin of the imaginary disease, but in the site of it. The patient complained of growth in the stomach. A very vital organ that would frighten a sensitive, nervous woman, particularly as we know from her own history that she already had, as a child and a young woman, witnessed members of her own family die of cancer.

Another point I would like to emphasize is that she was an intelligent patient. She was a school-teacher and, no doubt, during her studies, she had had a smattering of medicine. Not enough for her to know the exact nature of cancer, but more than enough to give her that dangerous little knowledge that had twisted and diseased her mind.

She refused to eat and she was a mere skeleton at the time of my examination. I had to take quite a new line of approach if this woman's life was to be saved.

I agreed with her, and told her she was suffering from a growth and that she was going to be operated upon as soon as she was strong enough. For the following few days repeated blood transfusion brought her to a state that guaranteed a successful operation. Theatre staff, assistant and anaesthetist were warned as to her condition, and the operation proceeded on strictly orthodox lines. Pre-operative treatment was the same as in stomach cases. On the table a skin incision was made in the mid-line of the upper abdomen. No further surgical intervention, however, was performed. The skin incision was stitched in the usual manner and the patient bandaged. During the following two weeks the patient received the same post-operative treatment as for cases of gastric tumour. Three weeks later she left the hospital completely cured, her mind and body again in a normal condition.

During the past two years I have seen the patient periodically and she has never shown any signs of relapse, either in her mental or physical health.

In conclusion, two important questions arise. First, was I justified in operating and subjecting the patient to the risks of an anaesthetic when I knew full well that she was not suffering from any organic disease? I think I was, because every other treatment had failed

completely and her life was at stake. I am convinced that should the worst have happened, and had the patient died under the anaesthetic, any coroner would have approved of my line of action.

The second question is, am I justified now in disclosing the treatment? What about the patient if she happened to read the report and to realize that the treatment was for an imaginary disease? Here, too, the answer is yes. In the last year, in the course of professional conversation, the patient was told exactly what had taken place, and my relief was immense when I saw that she was not perturbed at all when she discovered that the operation was not at all what she imagined, and that the growth was only imaginary. In her own words, she admitted that it was the only way for her to be cured; and now many months have passed since she knew of the real nature of the treatment and she is still in a perfectly normal state of health and doing work of great national importance. Finally, the present history is published with the full permission of the patient.

But I am anticipating events. It wasn't as easy as I have written it down. It brought me to a conflict with a colleague that threatened to develop into a dispute of medical etiquette versus patient's health.

'Tell me this,' I was saying to my house surgeon, 'on the day that the operation took place did you know that this patient had already been seen by one of our surgeons.'

'I did,' he admitted.

'Why then did you insist that I should operate on the woman? You realize that if anything happens now, the whole responsibility and blame will rest on me? In other words, you have put me in the predicament of being accused of breach of etiquette.'

He had recovered from my sudden onslaught and eyed me steadily. 'I did realize all that, Mr. Sava,' he replied, 'but I believed you were the best person to deal with the case.'

'Very flattering,' I said sarcastically. 'If that is intended as a compliment it is one I would rather have dispensed with. But it doesn't explain why you didn't call the surgeon who had already seen her in his rooms. It is not your job to decide who is to operate on the patients, you know. Why did you do it?'

His gaze never wavered. He looked at me straight in the face.

'Surely,' he said quietly, 'the answer is in to-day's operation. The other surgeon had refused to operate and I knew that the woman's life was at stake. That was my reason.'

I did not point out that he had committed a gross breach of

medical etiquette which would involve me, at least, in unpleasant relationship with a colleague. Medical men are very susceptible and allergic when their diagnosis or decisions are questioned, particularly if it happens at the same hospital where they work. It is a matter of conjecture, but I do believe there are a few doctors who will not readily admit a failure. I am not accusing them of persisting in their opinion intentionally. Far from it. But I do suggest that I have heard heated disputes and arguments over a case that turns out to be a very simple one. Perhaps we are forgetting that doctors, too, are human beings.

'That is no excuse! You know that etiquette demands that I should not interfere with another man's patients. Whoever it is will be annoyed when he hears of this.'

'I don't think so,' Davies returned. 'No-one will be anxious to interfere when the patient has been treated successfully. What shall I tell her friends?' he asked, as though eager to change the subject.

'I do not think they need be told anything, Mr. Davies,' I answered. 'Explanations, if they are needed, must be given by the surgeon concerned. You understand?'

'Yes, sir.'

I took upon myself the not very pleasant task of explaining to the patient's friends the nature of the operation that had been performed. I put the position as tactfully and as unsensationally as I could. But they wanted to know more about it.

'But what is it?' one of them demanded. 'She has been seriously ill for months and Mr. Hinkle not only flatly refused to operate, but said that it was all pure imagination. It's most astonishing!'

So it was Hinkle! Perhaps I was not so surprised. Hinkle was an admirable theorist and could have been a really first-class surgeon if he had not stuck unwaveringly to his rather conservative and antiquated theories. He allowed his sense of responsibility to override his practical application. And of two procedures possible in a given case, he would automatically choose the older one.

After I had said good-bye to the patient's friends I met Davies, who was still looking a little worried.

'How is she taking it?' I asked.

'Very well. I think it is a great success.'

I interrupted him sharply. 'You knew that Mr. Hinkle was the surgeon concerned.'

He nodded shortly.

'But you wouldn't tell me. Let this be a lesson to you, young man.

Don't butt in on another man's case or invite anyone else to. It nearly always leads to trouble with a capital T.'

To tell the story briefly, I had a rather unpleasant conversation with Hinkle, as I had anticipated.

'What the hell d'you mean by operating on my patient?' he demanded angrily, without a word of greeting.

I forced myself to remain calm under this onslaught. 'I was not told that she was your patient,' I replied. 'Besides, what does it matter if the patient has received the appropriate treatment? After all, we do work together and I wouldn't mind if you operated on one of my patients. I would be rather grateful.'

'Davies knew very well whose patient she was,' he retorted.

'That may be so, but he didn't tell me. I was told only that a patient needed my attention and it was not till after the operation that I learned she had seen you and you advised against an operation.'

'And you thought it a good opportunity for taking the rise out of me. Well, you have succeeded. Patient and friends are singing your praises and no doubt will be only too willing to say what a fool I have been.'

'For God's sake, Hinkle,' I said, steadying my voice. 'I can't see why we are quarrelling and I refused to make any statement to her friends which might be misconstrued against you.'

'Very good, I'm sure,' he sneered. 'You are not suggesting that you are the only man who could have done such a miracle? But what would you say to the coroner if the patient died? On what grounds have you operated? It certainly won't do much good to the hospital.'

'Look here, Hinkle, let's be fair. No man on earth could condemn me for operating and trying to save a woman's life. As for the reason that prompted me to do so, I'll take full responsibility. Does that satisfy you?'

That seemed to have settled our misunderstanding. But although the patient recovered and left the hospital, my professional relationship with Hinkle remained rather strained.

And it was clear that he resented me. I could not make out whether he hated me for trying to save the woman's life or failing to make a blunder of it. The atmosphere between us became stifling, and I was not sorry when I was asked to go elsewhere under the Emergency Medical Service Scheme, so that my connection with Hinkle's hospital became less close.

The whole episode had been very trying. I had done my best to smooth it over, not only for my own peace of mind, but because I did believe it was a genuine urgency. I could not bring myself to the opinion that Hinkle was so bad a colleague as that; and he may have been right when he tried to shift the principal blame on to Davies. But whatever he thought, he should never have done that, as I was responsible for everything that happened during the course of the operation. This rule may sound harsh, but it would be an impossible position if a surgeon could shift the responsibility for anything and everything that went wrong to an assistant, who was probably little more than a student.

When the blitz came my own private opinion was confirmed. Hinkle was not a bad surgeon. There might be a great gulf between modern methods—perhaps modernist would be the better word—he advocated in his articles and the cumbrous, antiquated procedures he most often adopted in his actual work, but he was competent. The writings were only part of the pose he had adopted as a leader of new thought in an attempt to build up a big reputation outside his own practice.

Stories of his work in the blitz filtered through to me. Many of his operations were magnificent. Under the stress of the time, he had jettisoned all his pretensions. During that trial none of us had time to think of the effect our work might make on the outside world. We had a tough job of work to do, and we did it, seniors and juniors, capable men and not so capable, to the best of our several abilities. I have with my own eyes seen pink-faced assistants operating with the coolness and dexterity of veterans; and men of established reputation making a mess of a simple case through sheer fatigue and frayed nerves. Hinkle was one of those who found himself in the blitz. He was able to let his own natural talent show itself in its true light. Without that experience it might well have been that one particular patient would have preyed on his mind and undermined the whole basis of his career.

Chapter 20

An Old Friend Passes

One little girl died. We had done all we could, but we could not stem the dropping tide of life, though at one time it seemed as if our efforts were going to be successful. That is what happens in all medicine, whether the doctor works with the knife or with the vast resources of modern chemistry as his weapon. Our knowledge is still imperfect, and our prognoses must always contain an element of doubt. Our certainties are no more than probabilities. And because there is this element of what we call chance (for the simple reason we do not want to advertise our ignorance too much), there are as many unforeseen results one way as the other. The doomed patient makes a seemingly miraculous recovery. The one we are satisfied about and for whom all looks well succumbs without a fight.

That is why when a doctor writes his reminiscences he must be content with something less than the poetically perfect ending he would often like to give to a case history. No doubt all of us would like it to be thought that we are always right, that things invariably turned out as we had foretold. The writer of memoirs is always at a disadvantage compared with the writer of fiction. Facts never fit neatly into a preconceived pattern, and the march of events is never inevitable.

I have been guilty of the sin of suggestion in this book. I have hinted that I was, on one occasion at least, irrevocably right. It would have been the artistically perfect ending if the Grand Duchess Natalia Ivanovna of Wlastopol had died that day. By all the rules of surgery and medicine she should. But the fact remains that she did not. And I have to record that fact.

I repeat, she should have died. The medical bases for that assertion were many. By them she had no right to live. She had taken one chance too many in toying with fate, and the penalty was obvious. But she did not die. Then, as through all her life, her brave spirit laughed at fate and destiny and made a mock of them.

And she should have died from the artistic point of view. Her death then, in those circumstances, would have rounded off my

story perfectly. Perhaps that is why I suggested that she did die. The longing for artistic fitness got the better of my sense of truth. But I did not intend to leave it like that. Confession was always at the tip of my pen.

The Grand Duchess had flouted my advice. She had accepted that of an obvious charlatan. She had played fast and loose with the most terrible disease of modern times. I had struggled with Father Pyotr and been worsted, as it seemed. And then came Nemesis. Father Pyotr's victory appeared complete. She was well, happy, gay, so that at times I almost doubted my own diagnosis and began to wonder whether there was not, after all, something in this blessed arrow business. Unreason, on the surface, was more powerful than reason, faith more potent than science.

And when she was at the very height of her recovery the blow fell. In their anxiety the husband and daughter turned not to the healer in whom they had so ostentatiously placed their trust, but to me, the man whose advice they had spurned. The wings of death beat about her. Even Pyotr was humbled and acknowledged his fault. If I had bought my success at the price of a loss of a dear friend, that merely heightened the climax. It was a situation in which any novelist worth his salt would have revelled.

But Natalia Ivanovna did not die. She believed in life, not in death, and her artistic conscience was not so overpowering that it commanded her to give up her life to round off an episode smoothly. I can put it only in that way. She refused to die. She collapsed at a moment when a collapse should have spelt certain death to a patient in her condition. We, her medical attendants, supplied those last despairing rites that are in most cases a forlorn hope, an expression rather of a man's refusal to admit defeat by Nature than anything else. When they asked me to go to her I did not go, because I had no wish to add to the crowd by a death-bed. I have seen too many of them in my time . . .

As a doctor I should have been disappointed that she did not die. She had proved all my dark forebodings as false. But as a friend and a human being I rejoiced. A life saved is precious. Cases that recover unexpectedly as she did atone to a large extent for those like that of the little girl. They keep alive that sense of humility which should be a doctor's most treasured possession.

Men and women react to these situations differently from a doctor. The latter is more interested in the scientific side. He wants to know, whether the patient lives or dies unexpectedly, why, so that he can

increase his knowledge and be more certain in the future. The ordinary person takes it for granted that the doctor should have known. If the patient dies when there has been talk of recovery, then the doctor has been an overweening fool, a man with so small a sense of responsibility that he was ready to build up hope when none should have been allowed and condemned relatives and friends to needless torture from the shock of the unexpected.

But let him prophesy death where no death supervenes, and the case is entirely different. At first he may be looked upon as a fool and a pessimist, a man who had no room for hope in his dark mind. He will be seen as a man so little trustful of his powers that he was prepared to foresee the worst when all the time he may have expected something better. Alternatively he may be regarded as a man who wants to create an atmosphere in which his great skill will be better appreciated. 'This is a case in which everything looked hopeless,' he is supposed to have hinted; 'yet all has turned out well. See what a great and skilful man I am!'

Those are the first and inevitable reactions. Then comes the feeling of gratitude. Perhaps at first the truth is not realized—the truth that a loved one has been brought back from the very thwarts of Charon's ebon boat. When it is, there is a revulsion of feeling. The doctor, shaking his head over the infallibility of human knowledge, is acclaimed as a hero. He has worked a miracle. And so the legend grows. Over teacups and at dinner tables, at cocktail parties and in bars, the story goes about. 'That fellow X is a marvellous chap, old boy. My old mother was absolutely hopeless—expected her to fluff at any moment. But he pulled her round all right. Absolutely marvellous!' Or it may be: 'My dear, he's a perfect *genius*! Why, she was as good as a corpse, and we were all wondering whether we ought to wear black or not. Mourning's always so difficult, isn't it? And with all this coupon business . . . What he did I just can't tell you, but it was marvellous, darling. He's absolutely wizard!'

Adulation of this kind can be extremely trying. One does not want it. One does not get it, as a rule, when one really has done a piece of work of which one can feel justifiably proud. I had too much of it after the recovery of the Grand Duchess Natalia Ivanovna.

The Grand Duke and the Princess Dania refused absolutely to heed my warnings that this recovery could only be temporary. Natalia Ivanovna was alive. Sufficient unto the day was the goodness thereof.

'What I cannot understand', said the Grand Duke, 'is why you

were so obstinate at first in refusing to operate. It is obvious there was a chance, and I can't see why you were so reluctant to take it.'

I sighed wearily. This had gone on too long. It was several weeks after the operation. What annoyed me was that the Grand Duke took it for granted while I was still rather puzzled.

'I think I always said there was some sort of a chance,' I replied as patiently as I could. 'No one is infallible, least of all a surgeon. What I forgot to give proper recognition to was Natalia Ivanovna's love of doing the unexpected. She refused to die. That's all there is to it.'

He smiled happily. 'I always believed she would make a fight. She always has. I should have crumpled up long ago but for that twinkle in her eye and that resolute spirit of hers. You see, she could conquer even death with it.'

'Yes, so it seems.'

He was delighted as a child. Every time I saw him he returned again and again to the 'miracle' I had wrought.

'You underestimate yourself, my boy,' he said to me once. 'It's a mistake. I must confess I never really had any hopes.'

'Neither had I,' I replied, but he refused to believe me.

But if the Grand Duke's hero-worshipping gratitude grew tiring, Princess Dania's attitude was almost frightening. There was no doubt that in her mind I had worked the most astonishing and genuine miracle. I was a magician, a wielder of superhuman powers. Even when I could not see her I could feel her eyes following me with an expression of rapt admiration.

Now I am not averse as a rule to being looked at admiringly by beautiful young women. But there was something different in this. I had seen that look before. I had noticed the expression with which she had gazed adoringly at Father Pyotr. I did not wish to be classed with him or pick up the cloak he had dropped in passing. It was far too clear to me that I had taken his place in Dania's affections. It worried me. To act as deputy or successor to a holy man was not at all in my line.

'It is your faith,' she gushed at me. 'You doubted your skill . . . I could see that . . . but you had faith, and your faith conquered. You try to make out you're a terrible realist, George, but you're nothing of the sort. You are a Russian and faith is always the dominating force in Russians.'

'So I am one of her Russians,' I thought. I was not pleased. I am proud of my Russian ancestry—perhaps never so proud as to-day when

Russia is battling so strongly for the future of a rational world—but I did not want to be one of Dania's Russians. She knew nothing of Russia but what she had been told. She saw it through the tinted, swirling vapours of the White Russian's nostalgia. To her, Russia was a Never-Never Land, a country of mystery and mystics, in which the supernatural was the commonplace and where an intangible thing called the Russian soul moved about darkly, working strange miracles. It was Fairyland, and she was the wondering child who believed wholeheartedly in it, because she had no leaven of actual experience to work into the dough of romance that her elders kneaded for her.

It was all the more terrifying in her because otherwise she was the typical sophisticated twenty-year-old of the day. She had been educated in France, England, and America. She had visited most of the fashionable places of Europe and elsewhere and mixed with what are curiously known as the best people. On most things she had a modern and refreshingly youthful outlook. But Russia, the old Russia, was an esoteric religion to her, a sacred name that must not be profaned. In candid moments she admitted that Russia had made much material progress since the fall of the Tsars. But she attributed it to that mysterious Russian soul working in spite of the communist leaders who blasphemed against it.

'I was rude to you', she said once, 'over Father Pyotr. I misjudged you, and I am sorry, because I see that I was seriously in the wrong. The Holy Father represented to me then the pinnacle of faith and good works. When you opposed him, and told him he was wrong and accused him of being a charlatan, I was outraged by what I thought was your materialism. But I see how mistaken I was. Your faith, working in a different way, was stronger than his, and you knew it. You knew that in the end you would triumph. And when you refused to operate it was because of your great faith, which brought with it true humility.'

'I refused because all the indications were against surgical intervention,' I replied grimly. 'If faith has anything to do with Natalia Ivanovna's recovery, it is her own faith in life. As I have told Ivan Pavlovitch repeatedly, she refused to die, and that is all there is to it.'

'You have the greatest faith of all,' she said meekly, staring at me with round, worshipping eyes. 'It is the faith that does not know itself.'

'Shall we leave it at that?' I said very wearily. I had no wish at all to be classed as a faith-healer. The bitter pleasure of my

triumph over Father Pyotr had gone, for it was obvious I had not triumphed. I thought I had conquered superstition in these people's minds, and now I found that in one at least superstition lived more strongly than ever. I had been right, not because I had opposed knowledge to ignorance but because I was a better practitioner in Father Pyotr's own line of business. If I had got rid of that fakir and his parlour tricks, it was only to find myself installed in his vacant place with somewhat higher honours. Dania, whom at first I had considered because of her youth and upbringing to be a possible ally, was really my greatest enemy. She had a cast-iron creed—or rather an armour-plated one that nothing would or could pierce.

I understood now her savage attack on Pyotr, which I had at first ascribed to a realization of the truth and saw it to be nothing more than injured pride. It had hurt her first that she had so trusted the holy father, and secondly that she had been unable to discern in me the qualities or powers that she now attributed to me. It made me feel depressed and humiliated. It alarmed me. As far as possible I avoided her. But I could not avoid her completely. I was too often at the Grand Duke's house for that.

The trying experience of the last few months had influenced him profoundly. The utter exposure of Father Pyotr had shattered his belief in much that hitherto he had held as cardinal truths of life. It symbolized for him, I think, that final collapse of the Russia he had known, and I watched him struggling pitifully with his memories and the stern facts of reality. He was old. He had lived a long and full life. And now, at the end, the principles to which he had clung so honestly had been torn from him. He had not the elasticity of youth to turn eagerly to something new. His existence had become purposeless and empty.

And the war in Russia had also affected him deeply. At first he hailed it as the first sign of the deliverance of his country from those who had dominated her for a quarter of a century. He hoped for the collapse of Hitlerism and Stalinism in one great débâcle. But he knew his Russian people. Let that never be forgotten about many of these old aristocrats: they knew their fellow-countrymen. He realized that the Russian resistance that had staggered the world could come from only one thing: that the people were fighting for something in which they believed, for something that had had the power of rousing all that heroic sacrifice of which the Russians are perhaps more capable than any other people.

There was something almost tragic as one detected signs of his

change of view. In his soul the vision of the old Russia was slowly fading. Slowly and painfully his love for Russia, and not merely a part of Russia—his own part—was being reborn.

'I'm beginning to see things more clearly,' he said to me. 'I don't bear the Bolsheviks any goodwill and I'm never likely to when I remember the sufferings they have caused. I don't mean necessarily to myself. Perhaps I might forgive that. But when I think of all that Natalia Ivanovna has had to endure I can associate the Red régime only with cruelty and injustice. They were determined to sweep us all out, the good with the bad. Some of those who were thrown out deserved nothing better. They were ready to sell Russia for anything, provided it meant profit and comfort for them. But not all of us were as bad as that. Prejudiced perhaps . . . but what man is not? Some of us tried to do our best for Russia in our own way, and our only crime was that it was not the revolutionaries' way. That is right, isn't it, George?' he added anxiously.

I nodded. The Grand Duke was the victim of his own system. I told him so.

'Some of you—like yourself and Prince Wengerov—were working for a better and juster system,' I said. 'But on the whole the Tsar and his court had brought Russia to the edge of ruin. The Russians are a patient people. They can endure much and they suffer in silence and with fortitude. But the burden had become too great. They turned to leaders who promised to sweep away all the old abuses and give the people a chance. It is not your fault to that extent. But how would it have been possible for them in the midst of a civil war to separate the sheep from the goats? Everyone associated with the old system was suspect and had to meet his fate with the rest.'

'That is not justice.'

'It is not justice,' I agreed, 'but does one expect justice in war—especially civil war? Tempers are too hot. And besides, had not the aristocracy in their madness to retain the power they thought was their divine right turned against their own principles? Think of what happened. The Tsar abdicated and laid aside all his power. A liberal interim government was established. Now, according to all the old ideas, the Tsar's decision made in that way was irrevocable. But the aristocrats would not accept it. They turned that part of their armies which remained loyal to them against the new government. They denied the wish of the people. Surely such men deserved to perish?'

'Perhaps that is so, but we did not understand. We looked on ourselves as the custodians of the people's welfare and happiness. It was not for them to tell us what to do. We had been brought up in that school and we could not change all our ideas in a night.' He spoke with a puzzled air. Even now the moral of the lesson was not clear.

'No. And because of that you and your kind suffered, as you say, the good with the bad.'

'We did not see that the will of the people was to displace us,' he continued. 'We were deaf to the voice of Russia.' The note of mysticism, never far away, crept in again. That mysterious entity 'Russia' had made its appearance once more. 'We saw an alien system suddenly being thrust on us and our people, and we rebelled. We were blind to the fact that the new system would not last and that though we might pass—the Tsar himself might pass—Russia would again assert herself and take charge of the situation, forcing even the aggressive Bolsheviks to do her will.'

I looked at him curiously. This was a new line of argument. I had not heard it before, and I wondered what strange mental processes had been going on: how he had managed to salve his conscience so that he could harmonize his ingrained principles with some sort of acceptance of modern Russia.

'It is simple,' he added slowly. 'I am not so ignorant of Russia to-day as you sometimes think. I had studied her progress. It was not that I was interested in it for its own sake, but because I searched every piece of news and information for the signs of cracking and decay that I was sure would show sooner or later. Where I was wrong was in thinking that when those signs appeared Russia would call us back to repair the damage and restore the old stability. Now I see that the new rulers were wiser than we—they were prepared to accept change and act on its lessons.'

'I do not quite follow you,' I put in.

'But surely it is clear if you recall Russian history since 1917? Think of it. The Bolsheviks came into power and they swept away everything that was old—the Tsar and his court, the aristocracy, money, capital, the Church, everything. But after a little while they saw that it would not work. They embarked on the New Economic Policy and many of the old features of Russian life were restored. Then came the Five Year Plan. That seemed another revolutionary change. They paid salaries in roubles again, and there were rich and poor as there had always been. But all this was part of the revival

of the Russian soul. The unalterable features of Russian life were asserting themselves. Even in the past year or so, with war on the doorstep, the changes have gone on. They have abolished all this tomfoolery about equality. Men are not equal and never will be. Why, in their latest educational decrees the Bolsheviks have even reinstated fees at the universities and technical colleges, except for the brilliant and deserving who can win scholarships. That was always a great feature of Russian university life. We always had more scholarship students than any others in Europe.'

'This is very interesting,' I said, in order to keep him going.

'I have thought a lot about it, especially since this war with Germany started. I read of the heroic defence of the Russians and I said to myself. "This is the old Russian people," and I could not understand how the Bolsheviks could have preserved that spirit. Then I reviewed all I knew of modern Russia and I saw that what I thought was a chain of evolution leading back to the restoration of the old was just a process of Russianizing the new. Russia always triumphs against enemies of all kinds.'

'Well? How do you make out Russia to-day is more like the old Russia than ever before?'

'Because everything points to it. The new rulers have found out that the Russian has his own way of life. They tried to put him into factories and urged him to work for the glory of communism and the dignity of labour itself. But the old spirit remained. Workmen went from factory to factory, from farm to farm. Wasn't that why, in the old days, serfdom was introduced . . . to tie the Russian to his job and provide something that would offset his natural vagrancy? Of course it was! The Bolsheviks have had to introduce something of the same sort. They paid different rates of wages so that men should stop where they wanted them. They tampered with the social insurance system so that the same result should be secured. And now they have drafted labour laws that give them very much the same powers as the old landowners had. The Russian workman is theirs to dispose of through their Labour Reserve into which all young men are drafted.'

It was an ingenious exposition. He had gone far to reconciling the new with the old. I did not agree with all he said, and I resolved to press him.

'Do you say, then, that the success of the Soviets is due to their having gone back to the old ways? Do you deny them any sort of success but that?'

'It is rather difficult,' he replied, 'but I think that is more or less true. I do not think they have achieved anything that the old Government would not have given the country.'

'Surely that is rather a sweeping claim?'

He shook his head. 'No, I don't think so. We had passed education laws that but for the war of 1914 would have given the people all the Bolsheviks have given them. Not all the Russian employers were grinding and hard. There were bad ones and good ones as there are here in England and in every country. Some of the factories had their own building estates and welfare schemes, and they would have been expanded. Russia was being brought up to date. All the Bolsheviks have done is to take over and claim the credit for bringing to fruition a movement that had already been started.'

'So you think that the Tsarist régime would have made Russia much what it is to-day if it had been left alone?' I asked, rather disbelievingly. 'You think that the people would have worked as hard if they had known that the profits were going to a privileged class?'

'What is the difference to-day?' he returned. 'Isn't there a new privileged class, a new aristocracy? To-day, it is not birth that counts—though it does to some extent, even now they no longer discriminate so much against men with bourgeois origins as they call them. That may be true, but there is an aristocracy none the less. The Party chiefs have their fine homes, their cars, their richly dressed women, the wealth to send their children to the university even though the children are dunces. What is the difference except in name? And those Party chiefs are not always the men who have made a success of their jobs. They are more often than not just talkers and propagandists.'

'Then you feel reconciled to the Soviet Union?' I asked. I saw he had built up his own theory of modern Russia and would not be budged from it. He was putting an interpretation on facts he could no longer deny—an interpretation that accorded with his own conception of Russia. Perhaps it was sophism. But who can say? Is not Russia after a quarter of a century of isolation from the world, as much a land of mystery as it was when Queen Elizabeth's argosy set sail to discover the Muscovite Empire and open trade with it as an offset to the Spanish conquest of the New World?

'I am not reconciled to the Soviets,' replied the Grand Duke firmly. 'They have done much harm to my friends and to my family. They have caused the innocent to suffer with the guilty as much as any Tsar did. And they have not the courage to admit that the old

Russian way was the right one for the Russian people. They condemn the principle of Tsardom and revile it. But is not Stalin an uncrowned Tsar? They talk of freedom and democracy. But has the All-Union Council of Soviets as much power to stay the hand of Stalin as the Duma had to put a check on the Tsar? No, George. With my dying breath I will condemn the Soviets and the Bolsheviks. But I can no longer argue that they are not Russian. Russia has conquered them, but has not called us back. She prefers these rulers to us, provided they work her will and fulfil her destiny, and I must accept that decision. To-day, if I say I would do anything to help the Russians in their fight against the Germans, it is not because I hold the thieves and liars of the Kremlin in any less contempt than I did twenty years ago. It is because I see the Russian people—my people—fighting for that which is holiest and best in the Russian soul. I am ready to fight and defend and die for Russia. But I will not bow the knee to the Soviets.

'I have no wish now to go back to the old life,' he continued. 'I have lived too long in the west. I understand now that much of what we thought essential was due to our backwardness and our inability to see that the world had changed and was changing more rapidly than it had before. The Bolsheviks have done nothing for Russia. They have merely done what we, in our own good time, would have done. But it is too late to think of that. The Bolsheviks brought death and ruin and suffering to me and to those I loved. I can never forgive them. I can never forgive them for branding me and those who worked with me as enemies of the Russian people, whom we loved and did our best for. There are some things beyond forgiveness.'

'But you are convinced there will be no return for you or your descendants?'

'For me and my generation—no. We are old. This war is destroying the last fragments of our world, and to-morrow lies with youth. But as to my descendants, I cannot say. As Russia reasserts herself more and more, and the truly Russian life is restored by the Bolsheviks themselves, I think our Mother Russia will gradually call back all her children so that they may work and live where they can be happy and free. That is my faith. There have been times when I misunderstood it, but I keep repeating it because I do not wish you to think that I have become converted to Bolshevism and the creed of my enemies. My faith is in Russia, and Russia will in the end conquer everything alien and unholy that is thrust upon her.

Her armies are fighting now against a creed that tears at the roots of the Russian way of life. They do so not because they are Bolsheviks or inspired by communist propaganda, but because they are Russians whose sacred soil has been violated.'

I heard a lot more like this at various times. He became more at peace with himself, but I could see that fundamentally he had not changed. He still lived in a world apart. If his views were altered they were only altered in detail. In his heart he still believed that if Russia had been left to his caste the land would have enjoyed all the benefits under the sun. Nothing could shatter that inspired faith in himself.

He turned every item of news to the support of his thesis. He counted all the signs that seemed to him to indicate that the old system was coming back under a new name. Differences he either ignored or dismissed as of no account. It was the small similarities that mattered.

All his life he had lived under the shadow of delusion. And now that the first had been swept away he made a new one for himself. His early years had been dominated by the idea that he and his caste were Russia. For two and a half decades after the revolution he had deluded himself that sooner or later the Tsar and the Tsarist régime would be re-established. Now, when all seemed lost and the loyalty of the Russians to their régime was testified by every communiqué from the blood-drenched battlefields of the east, he found a new theory to support a faith that he could not slough off. There was something tragic and pathetic in his attitude.

If one drew his attention to the abuses of the old system, he answered with descriptions of abuses in the new. If one pointed to solid progress that even opponents of the Soviets admitted, he replied that these advances would have been made under any system. In his fresh beliefs he was as inflexible and staunch as in his earlier ones. His was a mind that knew no compromise.

What hurt him most, I think, was the change in the attitude of the whole English people, among whom he had now lived for a quarter of a life-time. Only a year or two back he had found sympathy with him, at any rate in the circles in which he principally moved. Now he found frank admiration for the Soviets. The realism of the British people had made one thing easy for them to grasp. A nation does not fight as Russia is fighting unless it trusts its leaders and believes in its mission. And Russia was the one country into which Hitler had launched his hordes to find no welcoming Fifth

Column. The Grand Duke spoke eloquently of the superiority of the Russian soul to mere political details. But there was a touch of mysticism and unreality about this argument that did not make it acceptable to hard-headed Englishmen. They would, I think, have been readier to welcome a complete change of heart and confession of past errors than the fantastically embroidered justifications that became popular in white Russian apologetics.

All this time Natalia Ivanovna hung in the shadowland between illness and fitness. She had made a spectacular recovery, but it was obvious even to the Grand Duke that she had not long to live. Her skin assumed that curious purity which marks the victims of cancer. She was neither well nor ill, and she suffered at times great pain. Already I was regretting the success of my operation, undertaken against my better judgement. Had I any right to rescue her from a painless death to condemn her, for how long I could not prophesy, to a life like this, with pain gnawing ever at her and the gulf of death opening ever more widely in front of her?

That is a question every doctor has to ask himself again and again in his career. Euthanasia is not so simple as some people would have us believe. We cannot weigh up neatly, as on a chemical balance, what constitutes happiness to others. Nor is our skill so great or our knowledge so complete that we can say without doubt what case is curable and what incurable. The surprising happens again and again, as with Natalia Ivanovna. And there is always the lurking thought at the back of one's mind that the progress of medicine has depended largely on the work of those who refused to admit that there was such a thing as an incurable condition, and who in the face of all the knowledge of their time, set out to command success where failure before had been inevitable. For as science progresses it does not remind us of our limitations as much as stress the still unrealized extent of our potentialities. The modern doctor believes that, if his knowledge was complete, it would not reveal to him certain conditions for which nothing could in any circumstances be done, but rather that there were no conditions that could not be controlled. Euthanasia, like eugenics, is a subject best left to amateurs whose acquaintance with science is of the nodding kind. It is not a problem to be added to the already large burden the medical man has to bear.

And if there were moments when I regretted having done something to snatch Natalia Ivanovna from the grasp of death, there were others when I was glad to have operated. Then she was gay

and brilliant, in every way her own self. On these occasions she twitted me mercilessly.

'Every man is a fool', she told me, her eyes sparkling, 'and doctors are among the biggest. Because they have to do with the immensities of life and death they give themselves airs and assume a profundity that is not theirs.' She was being oracular and I listened with a smile, for when she was in that mood she was rarely serious. 'You, George, have had your lesson. Don't argue with an old woman. I'd made up my mind to live, and neither you nor all the faculty of medicine was going to deny me my whim. I know it was unfortunate for you, but there it is. Don't cross people like me again. If I haven't got a hundred servants to command any more, at any rate leave me my own life to dispose of as I think fit.'

Her days were alternations of pain and comparative ease. There was one spell when she seemed to take a distinct turn for the better. For quite a while she suffered nothing but slight discomfort. But I was on my guard. I knew the deceptive course of this terrible disease, and I feared the final consequences. I knew, though I did not express my views, that eventually the periods of freedom from pain would become fewer and fewer and that she would at last succumb. How long it would be I would not forecast. But there were already signs that it could not now be long delayed.

It was during one of these periods of quiet that she decided to leave London.

'Why should I stay here?' she asked me. 'I have no specialities here now. London has become dull. We don't even hear the sirens to give us some excitement. Besides, the weather is good and I fancy a glimpse of the sun on the sea. I am going down to Devon for a while. Has my medical adviser any objection?'

'None, except that I shall miss you,' I replied. I added more seriously: 'And I shall be worried at not having you under my eye. You are not to be trusted, Natalia Ivanovna. You are incapable of making a true report on your condition. If you think you are well and have a new dress to make you happy, you will write to me and say that I am a quack and that there's nothing at all the matter with you. If you feel down in the dumps, you will merely say you are getting old and tired. I admit I shall be a little worried with you so far away. Promise me you'll send for me at once if you need me.'

'I shall not need you as a doctor, George,' she said characteristically and in proof of what I had just said. 'But, of course, I shall

miss you as a friend—a dear old friend. But we shall meet again.' Her face suddenly became drawn and serious. 'And don't think I shall disguise the fact to myself that I haven't long to live. That's why I'm going away to see that glorious red earth of Devon and the sun sparkling on the waves. I am tired of drabness. I want light, fresh air, all the eternal things of wind and rain and country, to remind me that after all I am only a small, insignificant part of God's great plan.'

'You have a wonderful philosophy, Natalia Ivanovna,' I replied. 'You make me feel ashamed.'

She stretched out her thin white hand and caressed mine slightly. 'I am not a philosopher, George. I want to show you that I am grateful to you for the risk you took to save me—that time. My life is over, but you gave me a few more months to enjoy it. I suffer pain, but at least I can look on God's sky and hear the strange, homely noises of his creatures. Yours is not the power of life and death, George. It is the power of life, given to you by God. Once you become obsessed with death, your powers will fail. If you omit one chance to give back life, no matter how slender it is, you will carry the torturing memory of it with you to the grave. Remember that when you have another case like mine—which heaven forbid! If I did not die, it was because God, who, though you deny so much of His truth, has blessed you, wished you to learn that lesson. I am happy that He made me His messenger.'

'Thank you, Natalia Ivanovna,' I said simply. It was all I could say. I could read in her eyes what she had not told me. Her sun was setting and the dark night of death was gathering round her. She wanted to settle down to sleep with a quiet mind.

I heard from her frequently. She had gone to one of those south-west resorts to which bombs elsewhere have brought a rich, golden harvest. She saw the sun sparkling on the waves as she had wanted to see it. The smell of the earth—a smell that is sacred to every Russian—smoked upwards on damp mornings into her nostrils. She found happiness where she had gone.

But like an undercurrent in her letters ran the suggestions of pain and death. Her writing at times was almost illegible. I was alarmed, but I knew there was nothing I could do. I had worked a 'miracle' once, but it was given to no man to do the same thing twice. Already I could picture those last few weeks of pain and suffering when the most we could do would be to dull the agony, to induce a simulation of death before it came . . .

The Grand Duke wrote to me and told me of her suffering. He asked me to come if I thought I could do anything. It saddened me to have to reply that there was nothing I could do. I knew the doctor who was attending her. His powers and mine were equally futile at this stage. Certainly my skill in morphia administration was no greater than his.

There is something particularly harrowing in waiting for an end like this that one can foresee in fact but not in time. But once again the Grand Duchess defeated me. This time she died—but she did not die as I prognosticated.

I had had a letter from her. She had been in one of her most cheerful moods.

'In London', she wrote, 'we got used to having the bombs without the sirens. Here, it is sirens without bombs. Almost every day we hear them, but we do not see anything. Why should they bomb us here? There is nothing of the slightest value to anyone, only a few old and decrepit people like myself and Ivan Pavlovitch . . .'

Why, indeed, should the German bombers come? Why did they come to Canterbury and Exeter and a dozen other small out-of-the-way places? They came to kill and destroy. So it was that they came to the Grand Duchess's holiday home, two days after she had written to me.

The sirens wailed, and everyone went about his business. It was the usual thing. Then there came the howl of a diving aeroplane. A surprised populace stared up at the sky. And as they stared, the bullets spat among them. Men and women dropped to the ground. Children screamed and ran to cover. The machine zoomed up again. The next sound was more menacing still—the shrill, rushing whistle of a bomb. It plunged straight through the roof of the largest hotel.

The Grand Duke, who had been out for a stroll, rushed panic-stricken to the scene.

'Natalia Ivanovna!' he moaned. 'Natalia!' But he was not allowed to approach very near. Some official or other led him gently away.

'Where was she?' he asked kindly.

'On the first floor,' mumbled Ivan Pavlovitch. 'The first floor. The room with the large balcony overlooking the sea. She liked it. She could see the sunlight dancing on the waves when she was not strong enough to go out. Tell me . . .'

'It's kindest to tell the truth,' said the official. 'There is not a

hope. The bomb came through the two upper stories and burst on that floor—in that very room—'

'Natalia!' whispered the Grand Duke. 'Natalia!'

But it was better thus. She was spared the awful agony of those last few weeks, the weeks during which she would have been drugged into insensibility so that she could endure the pain. And I think she would have liked to die in the way she did. I can imagine her with a smile on her lips cheating death of his last triumph, rushing at his dread form willingly rather than allow him to drag her towards him piecemeal.

. . . . .

I saw the Grand Duke a little while afterwards. He had buried Natalia Ivanovna—or what they could find of her; I never heard the truth of it—and he looked old, grey and broken.

'It is terrible,' he said wearily, 'but it is better so. You were right, George. It was terrible to see her suffer so. There was no rest for her, night or day. Yet she smiled. She laughed. She was always on the lookout for beauty and happiness. I am going to America. I have permission. It does not matter if I never reach there. Life has no meaning now that Natalia Ivanovna is dead. And thank you for all you did.'

He thanked me. I asked myself for what? That I had given her those last few months? Hardly that, for he had confessed that they had become unendurable, and it was not I who had given them, but Natalia Ivanovna's great, indomitable spirit which refused to die. Was he thankful that through me his faith in the miracles of the Church had been broken? Or was he simply thankful that the long-drawn-out end had come at last?

I did not know. I do not know now. It is some time since I heard from the Grand Duke Ivan Pavlovitch of Wlastopol. I think he left this country because he was tired of all the memories it held for him and because across the ocean he believed he might find some sort of peace. But by the time he reached there America was at war. Japan was at war. The whole world was drawing near the blazing furnace and beginning to hurl its own contribution of fuel to the growing flames.

Coda

The whole world is at war. Here and there are countries technically at peace, but they are only nodes in the vibrating string of conflict. When the note becomes a little higher, they too will find themselves in it.

I grew up during the First World War, and I came to manhood during the Civil War in Russia. I have fought my own battles in half a dozen different countries. And now I am living through another war. It has already tried to take away from me that which is most precious to me. Its gore-stained hands reached out and did their utmost to drag my wife and child into the swirling waters of the Atlantic. I have seen the world's greatest capital blitzed and scarred, and her people torn to ghastly caricatures of living beings.

But I do not despair. I know how high the tale of casualties can mount in modern war. I have seen them counted by the thousand among the peaceful ordinary citizens of London. Then people said that this was modern war in which casualties could never attain the figures of 1914–1918 and its huge massed armies. But that was before the vast battle for Russia. The German casualties in that grim business alone run to millions. Millions dead, dying, maimed, blinded, driven mad . . .

I repeat I do not despair. The carnage goes on—in Russia and Italy, in the homes of British towns and German and French towns, in the lotus-eating isles of the South Seas and along the ice-locked corridor to Murmansk. Every day Englishmen, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Frenchmen, Russians, Americans, Japanese, Indians, Rumanians, Yugoslavs, Italians, Germans, are tasting the bitter draught of death. But there is one thing that does not die—Humanity. It does not die before the crushing steel weight of the tanks or disintegrate in the blaze of high explosives. It does not wither when trampled on by the jackboot of the New Order, or stifle in the fetid air of the concentration camp. And because it does not die, the Nazis must in the end be beaten. For theirs is the creed of Inhumanity.

In the darkness of the cruelty and brutality that shrouds the world, little flashes of humanity show up the more strongly, like lightning

on a dark, moonless night. One becomes more conscious of one's neighbour's goodness than of his faults.

A Nazi airman raked the streets of a little town with machine-gun bullets. The inhabitants vowed awful vengeance. But just outside the town, the aeroplane crashed. A hundred people rushed forward. Two dashed into the blazing pyre and dragged out the pilot. One of the rescuers was more badly burnt than he. There are some who say that that sort of thing is foolish, that the Nazis are such devils they should be left to die amid the flames of their own creating. That is true—up to a point. But Humanity rises above such thoughts. In a moment it forgives and forgets. Its primal urge is to save life, not to destroy it. It is what has made man; and when it goes, man will be something else. He will have retrogressed to the beast from whom he sprang.

In these four years and more of war, my memories are of little things—the little things that are really great—rather than of the events that are turned into headlines.

I could not name offhand the date on which Japan attacked the American Fleet in Pearl Harbour. But I could tell you the date and time of the affair of the taxi-driver in the blitz.

I had set out for the hospital in a tearing hurry. A special call had come through. The bombing had started earlier than usual, and there was a sudden inrush of casualties, some of them bad . . .

As I turned a corner, my car went dead. Nothing I could do would make it go. I stared into the gloom and hailed a passing taxi.

'As fast as you know how,' I yelled, naming my hospital. 'It's an emergency call for casualties.'

He nodded and I saw him glance at the windscreen of my abandoned car. In the dim light of his masked headlight the red-painted label with the word 'Doctor' on it seemed to stand out like an illuminated sign.

I have never liked driving in the blitz. Corners are a nightmare to me, traffic in side-roads an unendurable penance. But this man twisted and turned through the byways so that he brought me to the hospital gates in a shorter time than if I had pursued my usual route in my own car.

'How much?' I asked.

'That's orlright, guv'nor,' he growled. 'Been in a jam meself and know what it's like. Perhaps next time it'll be me wanting you to give me a leg-up.'

'But——' I protested.

'That's orlright, guv'nor,' he repeated. And I realized that to press him further would have been to insult him. He felt that this was his contribution to the needs of the moment. I mumbled some unintelligible word of thanks and dived into the hospital.

In the morning, after a busy night, I thought this little incident over. It was not on the face of it very surprising. The London taxi-driver is an aloof and often apparently surly man, whose chief antipathies are giving change and waiting for traffic lights. During the blitz he had many unfair demands thrown upon him, and he did wonderful work getting people home through the inferno when no other transport was available. His temper suffered, and his reputation declined—though why people should expect anything but lack of service from men who they insisted should drive them through falling bombs and shell splinters to the scenes of fires and bombings merely to satisfy idle macabre curiosity, I cannot say. And that is what some did demand.

But I had heard also of the other side of the taximan's character. I had heard of not one but many cases in which these men had driven poor patients to the hospitals and never accepted a penny for it, though the whole of the loss was theirs if they did not own their cabs. I have even heard of a case in which a cab waited to take the patient all the way home across London. So my experience was not altogether surprising.

Then I did not realize quite how much he had done for me—or why. I heard the full story through the mouth of the gatekeeper.

My taximan had been cruising home, his petrol tank was almost exhausted. His home lay on the south side of the river near his garage in the tortuous streets of Brixton. He must have refused a good many north-bound fares. And at home he had a wife and two children waiting for him, facing the blitz—one of the worst London ever had—by themselves.

He had not hesitated when he saw my predicament. He had taken me to the hospital by the shortest route, so that his petrol might last out. And he had forgone everything for me. Not only his fare, but his peace of mind. There was no getting to Brixton that night for him. His cab was as useless as my car. In the morning they sent a lorry to tow it home.

The gatekeeper, a man somewhat soured by his experience of life, had pressed the driver for an explanation of quixotic conduct he was unable to understand.

'It's my kid,' he said. 'Stopped a packet two months ago, and

they said she'd never get well again—die perhaps. Then one of these blokes got hold of 'er and put 'er right. Spent weeks on it. Right as rain now, she is. So when I saw the doctor bloke stranded and he told me what the racket was, I said to myself, "Maybe 'e's one of these clever ones, and maybe there's someone else's kid up at that 'orspital 'e might save." So I told 'im to jump in. That's all.'

That was all. It was Humanity showing itself even on that black night; Humanity prepared to face very bad risk and a night of worrying anxiety because help was needed.

There are hundreds of stories like that from the blitz. There must be hundreds more, untold, unrecorded, in the annals of the Merchant Navy and the Forces. But the details do not matter. It is the fact that the spark is there and blazes brightly even in these times when men are deliberately schooled to be callous to suffering and killing has become the chief occupation of the youth of the world. That is the crowning victory of man.

Because it exists is my answer to those who ask why we should trouble about the future of man, about the saving of life, the perfecting of medicine and of surgery.

'What is the use?' these people ask. They argue that man is destructive by nature and that the sum of his constructive abilities can never equal the sum of his destructive achievements.

That outlook is false. In the heart of every man is that light of Humanity. It dominates the doctor and the policeman, the tradesman and the artificer. It is the common inheritance of man. And the problem of the future is how to make that light shine before all men, so that those whose evil intent is to obscure it shall be blinded by its brilliance.

What is the use of it all? I, too, have asked myself that question. When they have brought in the mangled bodies of children found among the debris of a bombed house, I have asked it. What is the good, I have asked, of giving these children a chance of life, of seeing that they are properly fed, of giving them medical service so that the once fatal illnesses of children are no longer so terrible, of caring for them and fighting for their future? All that happens is this—this madness, this murder.

But sometimes it is given to one to lead back life into one of those mangled heaps, to set again the little limbs so that they are strong and sturdy, to rebuild the burned and torn face so that bright eyes can look out again on the flowers and the trees, the birds and the beasts.

Then all one's doubts are swept away. One believes again in humanity. A smile from such a patient more than atones for all the deaths in the world. It re-establishes one's belief in Life as the principle of civilization and re-animates the desire to give all one's skill to its service.

Those who say that man's destiny is to fight are right. But they mistake the enemy. It is not man himself that he must fight but the evils that beset him. In conquering those—the enemies of poverty and unhappiness, of disease and suffering, of death itself—he will gain victories greater than any he will ever achieve on the blood-stained fields of Europe and the world at large.